

DAVE DAWSON AT TRUK



by R. Sidney Bowen

THE
WAR
ADVENTURE
SERIES

Books by R. SIDNEY BOWEN

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FORCE

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AT
TRUK

by
R. SIDNEY BOWEN

THE WAR ADVENTURE SERIES

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To
JOHNNY GILBERT

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CHAPTER ONE

On Again, Off Again

FREDDY FARMER shifted his position in the huge leather upholstered chair, decided that it wasn't comfortable enough, and shifted again. He still wasn't satisfied, but he was too bored and too lazy to exert any further effort. He stared gloomily at the torrents of rain slashing against the windows of the Officers' Club lounge, at the San Diego Naval Air Base, and sighed heavily.

"I fancy I'll never learn not to believe a word you say, not ever!" he groaned.

Hunched down in the next chair, Dave Dawson marked with his finger tip the place where he had stopped reading, and turned his head.

"Speaking to me, little man?" he murmured.

"Only because you happen to be the only one present," young Farmer snapped. Then, with a wave toward the rain-swept window panes, he

said, "I was remarking that I should know better than ever to believe a word you say. Beautiful California? Good grief! Just look at it!"

"Look at what?" Dawson chuckled. "That slight dew that's falling? Think nothing of it. Good for the crops."

"Dew, he says!" Freddy snorted. And then as a vivid flash of lightning blinded them both for a split second, to be followed by a bellow of thunder that seemed to lift the whole building right up off its foundations, he added quickly, "And that, I suppose, was just some chap out there striking a match?"

"Could be," Dawson laughed. "California's full of things you'd never believe unless you saw them. But don't toss the weather at me, pal. I'm not a native of this state, so you can't get a rise out of me. Anyway, what the heck are you crabbing about? No good weather, no flying. And that gives us a chance to catch up on something or other. Now, take this book I'm reading. I . . ."

"You take it, and keep it!" Freddy Farmer growled. "You know, Dave, you amaze me at times. Blessed if you're not as unpredictable as one of Hitler's speeches. Really."

DAVE DAWSON AT TRUK

"Yeah?" Dawson grinned at him. "How come? Add a few more words to that, will you?"

"With pleasure!" young Farmer snapped. "Some two or three weeks ago, when we were included in a bunch of pilots and such to be sent from England to America to help train Army and Navy pilots, you just about hit the roof. Why, you were fit to go down to American Air Forces H. Q. in London and tear the blasted place apart. You train fledglings to fly? Never, you declared! You belly-ached night and day. Why, when we arrived here and you learned that we'd been assigned to Naval Aviation, you went completely off the deep end. You were an Army flier, a fighter pilot, and all that sort of rot. And now, suddenly, you're as content as a bug in a rug. Blessed if I get it, Dave? Or did the commandant of the base here overhear a few of your remarks, and call you up before him for a blistering?"

"Nope, not that," Dawson said with a chuckle. "That I have calmed down, and am relaxed, is simply the result of another one of my sterling qualities that you have overlooked. I mean, the ability to adjust myself to existing circumstances."

"Oh, quite!" Freddy Farmer jeered at him.

"Particularly when you know blasted well that you can't do a thing about them!"

"Well, maybe you've got something there, pal," Dawson murmured, and stared at the rain-swept windows. "When I'm posted to some job I don't go for at all, I sound off just as a matter of habit. I really don't kid myself that my objections are going to change anything. You and I have been in this cockeyed war too long to think that everything is all cut and dried. It isn't. And it never will be. In war anything can happen, and you can bet your last dime that it will, eventually. So I just get the steam off my chest, then say, oh, what the heck, and let it go like that."

"I see what you mean," young Farmer grunted. "And I'll admit that I feel much the same way. Only I keep my thoughts to myself. Commanding officers have big ears, you know. And it would just be the Farmer luck to have my words reach one of those big ears. But this blasted rain!"

"A buck says that there won't be a cloud in the sky at the end of a couple of hours," Dawson said. "California's like that. But now that we're letting down our hair, I gather that you're not so hot for this instructing job, either, huh?"

"Definitely not!" Freddy groaned. Then he added quickly, "Not that I don't think these Navy chaps are top-hole, and all that. A very keen bunch of beggars, and they'll make good pilots, all of them. And you and I have flown enough with the Navy in the past to like it as much as flying with the Army. It's not that, either. It's . . . well, frankly, it's because I'm so blasted selfish, I'm afraid."

"Yes, you sure are, when it comes to snagging the odd piece of pie," Dawson said with a grin. "That, though, is the fault of that bottomless stomach of yours, and you can't help yourself. Just what do you mean by that last remark?"

"Just what I said, that I'm selfish," young Farmer replied. "Let some other chap have this instructing grind. I want to be on one of the fronts where there's action, and lots of it."

"Freddy, the old fire eater," Dawson chuckled. "But you've also got something there, too. So would I, and how! However . . ."

He let the rest slide and emphasized it with a shrug. Freddy Farmer frowned at him in a puzzled manner.

"See?" he eventually cried. "That's what I mean. The way you are now. Completely licked, you seem like. Blessed if it's like you, Dave.

Have you gone sour on something?"

"Heck, no!" Dawson cried, and sat up straight. "And don't get any dopey ideas that I feel licked about anything. I'm just biding my time, that's all. I mean, that something's bound to pop. It always has. It's just that I'm finally getting around to realizing that you can't push things along. You've just got to keep your shirt on when things get slow, and realize that there'll be plenty of fireworks sooner or later."

"Well, well, the chap must be growing up, after all," Freddy Farmer murmured. Then, before Dawson could open his mouth to make a retort, he said, "There must have been at least a hundred of us that came back to the States by Army Air Transport planes, wouldn't you say?"

"Yeah, more or less," Dawson grunted with a nod. "So what?"

"So what?" young Farmer echoed sharply. "So why?"

"Ye gods, right back where we started!" Dawson groaned. "The old rotation idea, that's why. A bit of front line service, and then a bit of back home service, passing out your knowledge to those who have yet to see action. For Pete's sake, Freddy! What's so mysterious about

that? Maybe it is a bit odd that we were stationed at a Naval Aviation base. However, perhaps the idea is to get Army and Navy pilots to know one another better. Too much rivalry between services is just as bad as none at all, you know."

"Well, I do, now that you've explained, sir!" Freddy barked at him. "But you still haven't answered my question. I mean, with the invasion of Hitler's Europe bound to pop any day now, why in the world send a hundred or more seasoned pilots *away* from England? Answer me that."

The corners of Dawson's mouth twitched in a grin, but Freddy didn't see it.

"I don't know that I've a right to tell you, Freddy," he finally said, and tugged at his chin with a thumb and forefinger.

"A right to tell me what?" young Farmer demanded. "Come off it, Dave! Stop being so blasted mysterious. You and I've always shared everything, haven't we?"

"Everything, except food," Dawson ribbed him. "You never were anybody's pal when you had the feed bag on. But I guess it's all right to tell you. It's because of what General Eisenhower said."

"To who?" Freddy asked.

"To whom, is what you mean, little man," Dawson said with a straight face. "What he said to *me* when he called me down to London High Command H.Q."

Freddy Farmer opened his mouth to speak, but a wrathful snort came out of it instead.

"I might have known!" he growled. "General Eisenhower call you to his headquarters? Rot! Pure rot!"

"Okay, then, have it your way," Dawson sighed, and returned his attention to his book.

Freddy glared at him for a few seconds, then gave a little resigned shake of his head, and took a deep breath.

"Very well," he said, "I might as well let you get it all off your chest. And what did General Eisenhower say to you, my good man?"

"For two cents I wouldn't tell you!" Dawson grunted. "But I don't really need the money, so I will. The general told me that we were all being sent back here for a home stay because the invasion of Hitler's Europe is *not* bound to pop 'most any day, as you have just so glibly remarked."

"Really, Dave?" Freddy Farmer gasped. "Honest? You mean . . .? Oh, blast you, stop

pulling my leg! I know perfectly well that General Eisenhower didn't say a word to you. You didn't even see him!"

Dawson grinned, and opened his mouth. But he closed it when he saw the look on young Farmer's face. Instead, he shook his head gravely.

"No, Freddy," he said. "The general didn't say a thing to me. It's dollars to doughnuts that he doesn't even know I exist. But I put it that way so's you'd catch on."

"Catch on to what?" Freddy wanted to know.

Dawson threw up his hands in exasperation.

"Sweet tripe, Freddy!" he cried. "It's past noon! Aren't you awake yet? It's obvious, pal, isn't it? Obvious that the invasion isn't going to pop right away. The High Command is marking time while the bomber boys give Germany a good going-over. So the experienced pilots that aren't needed in England have been sent back here to help with the training program. Don't worry, when the big show starts we'll be yanked back there, but fast. *That's* why I'm not tearing out my hair because I've been stuck on this instructing job. Because I know that when it's time for the balloon to go up I'll be sent there. And so will you. And so will all

the others that flew back from England with us. Now do I make sense to you?"

Freddy Farmer nodded, but he didn't say anything for a moment.

"Yes, you're quite right, I fancy," he murmured presently. "I must be slipping way off the beam not to have figured that out for myself. But I wonder how long?"

"When the Allied High Command is darned good and ready, and not a minute before," Dawson replied. "Meanwhile we stick here . . . and like it!"

"Maybe you can like it, but I don't," young Farmer growled, and glared at the window glass. "This blasted rain!"

Dave snapped his book closed, and tossed it on a nearby table.

"Check!" he grunted. "It seems to be letting up a little, though, so let's do something about it. A little of it may do us some good. Let's take a walk out by those orange groves. They looked pretty interesting from the air. How about it, huh?"

"Right-o," Freddy Farmer sighed, and got to his feet. "Anything's better than just sitting here listening to it!"

CHAPTER TWO

Strange Business

WITH AN angry gesture Freddy Farmer changed his rain slicker to his other arm, and pushed his service cap to the back of his head.

"Blast it, I'm going to rest!" he cried, and instantly pulled up to a halt. "You said a walk, Dave, not a cross-country hike to the Atlantic coast. You know how far we've come?"

Dawson slowed down and turned around with a grin.

"Who cares how far?" he said. "This is swell. The trouble with you is, you're falling apart from old age. But okay, if you have to rest. Some view, huh? Californians sure have a right to brag, don't they?"

"If they like," Freddy muttered, and sank down on a convenient tree stump by the side of the path. "But it's not my old age, I'll have you know. It's these blasted new shoes. Only wore

them once before. I certainly wouldn't have worn them if I'd thought you were coming this far. It's all of five miles, if it's an inch."

"Just the right distance for a nice work-out," Dawson said with a heartless grin, as he sank down beside Freddy. "But get those gunboats off and let's see if you've got any blisters. And speaking of blisters from new shoes, I once knew a guy who got a blister, and two days later, guess what?"

"What?" Freddy Farmer grunted, and began unlacing his shoes. "What about two days later?"

"He died, just like that," Dawson grinned, and snapped his fingers. "He was a swell guy, too. And it was just a little tiny blister. Didn't seem like anything at all. Let's have a look, kid. Maybe you got a *big* blister."

"You'll have something big, too, and on the side of your head, if you don't shut up!" Freddy growled, and held up one of his shoes by the toe. "One thing I always admired about you, young fellow, you do cheer up a chap so!"

"Always aim to please," Dawson chuckled, and leaned back on his elbows. "See that hill over there? How far, would you say?"

"I'm not saying, because I don't care a penny's

worth!" young Farmer snapped, and peeled off his socks.

"About three miles, I guess," Dawson murmured. "I think we can make it there and back to the base by dark. We'd get a swell view of the sunset from the top of that hill."

"You would, if you're fool enough to go there!" Freddy Farmer cried. "But not me, because I'm heading back to the base just as soon as I've had me a little rest!"

"Aw, don't be a sissy!" Dawson chided. "Come on. It will do you good. Really break in those new shoes of yours. I was kidding about it being three miles. It can't be more than a mile. We'll get a swell view of Dago and Coronado, Freddy. Come on; be a good guy!"

When there was no comment from his flying mate and dearest pal, Dawson turned his head and opened his mouth to speak again. But no words came from between his lips, and that was because of the scowling, puzzled look on Freddy's face. He was sitting up straight, holding a sock in each hand, and staring intently at the crown of a low hill a short distance in back of where they sat.

"What are you looking at?" Dawson demanded, and twisted all the way around.

"That little cluster of shacks up there," Freddy replied. "I just saw a couple of chaps sneaking along by them. They looked a bit strange to me. I think one of them was in uniform."

"So what?" Dave grunted as he eyed the group of weather-beaten shacks. "That's where the pickers live, I guess. For the orange groves, I mean. They're migratory pickers. They don't stay in one place all year round. Only for the picking season. Then they move, families and all, to some other section where a fruit crop has come in. That must be some life, I don't think. I wouldn't . . . I see them, now, pal. And one is in uniform. And—hey! They're looking around as though they wanted to make sure nobody was watching them. Crouch down, Freddy. They won't be able to see us for those bushes there. I wonder what their act is all about anyway?"

"Well, it certainly looks suspicious from here," Freddy Farmer grunted as he hugged the ground closer with Dawson. "And . . . I say, Dave, you see that?"

"See what?" Dawson demanded.

"The one in civilian clothes, if you could call them that!" the English-born air ace said breathlessly. "His right hand! He's got a gun in it. Watch, and you'll see the sun on it as he turns."

Dawson didn't make any reply. He hugged

the ground and peered past a clump of bushes at the two figures standing on the crown of the low hill no more than a couple of hundred yards away. One was very definitely garbed in uniform, but because of the position of the sinking sun, and the rays of light it cast off, it was impossible to tell what kind of a uniform at the distance. Then the other, the one obviously garbed in civilian clothes, turned slightly and the sunlight danced off a gun he held in his right hand. Dave gasped audibly, but it was not caused by sight of the sun on the gun. Rather, it was because of the figure's movements with the gun.

"Cat's sake, Freddy!" he grunted. "The guy is waving that soldier inside that shack with his gun. See? There they go in, both of them. What the heck do you suppose, pal?"

"Blessed if I know," Freddy breathed back. "Certainly looks deucedly queer, though. Do you fancy that soldier chap is being held up, or is in trouble?"

"I wouldn't know," Dawson grunted with a frown. "Maybe we should find out. But he didn't seem to act as though he were putting up any objections. I had the feeling there that he sort of smiled."

"Me, too," Freddy replied with a nod. "I was

wondering if you had seen it, or if it was just my imagination. Oh, it probably means nothing at all. We're just the suspicious type, I guess."

Dawson stared at the crown of the hill for a moment, and then lowered his gaze to the ground right in front of him, deep in thought.

"What are you thinking about, Dave?" young Farmer presently asked.

"The one thing that doesn't seem to make sense," Dawson murmured after another moment or two of silence. "That gun . . . and it certainly was a gun, wouldn't you say?"

"Definitely," Freddy assured him. "Looked like a long-barreled automatic to me. But it was definitely a gun of some sort. Well, what about it?"

"What's a civilian doing with a gun?" Dawson asked. "Particularly in these parts. This is a military zone, Freddy."

"Perhaps it's the soldier's, and he let him look at it," young Farmer offered.

Dawson just shrugged at that, and said nothing. He raised his eyes and stared at the shack into which the two figures had disappeared, and then presently he turned and looked questioningly at Freddy Farmer.

"Well?" he said.

"Well, what?" the English-born air ace replied innocently.

"You know exactly what I mean!" Dawson snapped. "Do we take a look to make sure, or do we just skip the whole thing, and start back to the base?"

"What do you think?" Freddy instantly countered with a question of his own. "Shall we, or shan't we?"

Dawson hesitated a moment, and then pointed at Freddy's shoes and socks.

"Put them on," he said. "Maybe it'll just be a horse-laugh on us, but maybe it isn't as it should be. It isn't picking season around here yet, and by rights I don't think there should be anybody living in those shacks. I . . . Oh, heck! Call me a curious cuss if you want to, but things like this get my curiosity clicking. I have to find out one way or the other."

"As though I hadn't known you long enough to realize that!" Freddy Farmer grunted, and began putting on his socks and shoes. "But for once I'm with you. It's aroused my curiosity, too. How do we operate? Walk right up there, or steal from bush to bush, your American Indian style?"

"Neither!" Dawson snapped, and pointed to

their right. "We use our heads, instead! We go back that way and circle up the rise from that end. Then we walk along with the shacks covering us. That way, if *we're* surprised we can say that we were just taking a look at the lay-out. Just remember, one of them has a gun. And he might be the kind of a guy who asks questions *afterward*."

"And right you are, for a fact!" Freddy Farmer breathed, and tied the last shoelace. "Your way suits me quite all right. As you Yanks say, there's no need to have somebody pull our necks out."

"You and Yank lingo!" Dawson groaned. "But skip it. Let's go, and . . . But, hey! What about your feet, Freddy?"

"They'll last," young Farmer assured him, and stood up. "It was only a pebble, anyway. Let's get going."

Only a pebble. Just a tiny fragment of stone. Yet the presence of that pebble in Freddy Farmer's shoe was to send them both into the Valley of Death, and perhaps even to change the entire course of the war in the Pacific!

CHAPTER THREE

The Talking Shack

"IT'S THE next shack beyond this one, Freddy," Dawson murmured softly as he laid a restraining hand on his friend's arm. "Just hold it a second, and see if we can hear anything. Somehow I like this even less. The door shut, and every shade drawn, such as they are. Or am I just getting jumpy?"

"Well, anyway, shut up, if you want us both to listen!" Freddy Farmer breathed back at him.

Dawson grinned, made a face, and then with Freddy standing motionless at his side, he listened intently for any sounds coming from inside the shack just beyond the one behind which they crouched. And he did hear sounds. So did Freddy Farmer. The muffled and completely indistinct sound of two people talking. A tremor of excitement rippled through Dawson, and he

squeezed Freddy's arm. A moment later, though, he frowned silently and wondered if perhaps he and Freddy weren't just being a couple of fools. After all, this wasn't the war zone. They weren't behind the enemy lines, or even their own lines. This was California, and what if they did see a soldier and a civilian go into one of the crop pickers' shacks? So what? And maybe, that gun wasn't a gun after all. Freddy and he would certainly look awfully foolish if the pair inside that shack should suddenly come out and see them crouched there gaping wide-eyed like a couple of kids playing cops and robbers.

Those and other disturbing thoughts floated through his brain as he frowned at the shack. He turned his head and looked at Freddy questioningly. And the look young Farmer gave him in return indicated clearly that the English-born air ace was entertaining pretty much the same thoughts.

"Maybe it's stupid, huh?" Dawson formed the words with his lips.

Freddy nodded slowly, but at the same time a sort of half puzzled and half stubborn look glowed in his eyes. And then in the very next instant what indecision either of them may have had was wiped away by a cry of anger coming

from the shack beyond. At least it sounded like anger to them both, although the sound was still too muffled to permit them to pick out individual words.

"Well, that tears it as far as I'm concerned!" Dawson grunted. "I'm going to get a better look, whether it seems screwy or not."

"Me, too, and right with you," Freddy Farmer replied. "There are some bushes there against the back of the place. No window to peek through, but we can certainly hear clearly through those loosely fitted boards. Good grief, what places for people to live in!"

Dawson nodded, and said nothing. He simply left their place of hiding and eased over to the protection of a line of scrub bushes. Keeping behind them, he swiftly made his way to the rear of the other shack. There he crouched down low and pressed an ear to the rough boards. Freddy Farmer quickly followed his move, and together they heard the high-pitched voice that was speaking inside.

". . . must not fail!" it said. "What I have given you must reach its destination as quickly as possible. However, not at the risk of your being suspected for one single minute. Do you understand?"

"Of course I understand!" a harsh voice re-

plied. "Do you think I am a fool? Do you think I am a baby playing at a man's game?"

"What I think is of no importance," the high-pitched voice replied. "Both you and I are but cogs in a great wheel that will crush the world. There is a saying in my native tongue that describes it perfectly, but I will not bore you by repeating it, as you do not speak the Japanese language. And when translated into your native tongue, German, it has no meaning at all. So forget that I mentioned it. You have your work, and I have mine."

A moment of silence followed, and Dawson was filled with a terrible fear that the thunder of his pounding heart could be heard beyond the loose board wall of the shack. He didn't dare turn his head to look at Freddy for fear that even that slight movement would create a sound that might be heard inside the shack. A Jap and a Nazi inside there? It seemed incredible! Like a crazy Hollywood concoction he had seen at the base movie house only the night before. It was . . .

But the one who was obviously a Nazi was speaking again.

"I was told that all my orders would come from Berlin."

"And so they have, in a way," the one of the high-pitched voice replied smoothly. "To be transmitted to you through me. Your country, and mine, fight this war together. It does not matter who gives the orders, or who performs them, so long as the enemy is defeated. Now, tell me, when do you sail?"

"Tonight," the other replied. "I must be back aboard the carrier within two hours."

"And so you will be," the Jap assured him. "There is no need for us to talk much longer. Here is the address of the one you will call on in Honolulu. Show him this, and he will know you come from me. He will probably give you additional information. Guard it well until you have placed it in the hands of Admiral Shimoda at Truk."

"But that is foolish, stupid!" the Nazi snarled. "My carrier force may not go within a thousand miles of Truk! And . . ."

"Do not worry about that!" the other cut him off. "The American dogs have met him with a few minor successes of late, and it has gone to their heads. They will act boldly now, and that is what Admiral Shimoda wishes. Yes, I am sure that your task force will steam to within easy flying distance of Truk. When your carrier

reaches that point you will see to it that you take off without creating *any* suspicion and fly at once to your destination. When you reach Truk you will be under the direct orders of Admiral Shimoda. It may be that he will desire that you return to your carrier for future use. If so, you can safely leave it to him to arrange matters so that your own force will pick you up as a pilot who unfortunately has been forced down into the water, and has floated about in his rubber life raft for a day or two."

"I would rather be sent to China to work there!" the Nazi growled. "I am sick of these swine Americans, and pretending to be one of them."

"I can sympathize with you there," the Jap purred. "I am sick of living under their rule, too. But at least I have the chance to travel often across the border into Mexico. There is a country that we will make great, once we have conquered the world. The Mexicans are . . . But I wander. Speak to Admiral Shimoda of your wish to go to China. Perhaps he will agree with you. However, there is other work for you to accomplish first, before carrying information to Truk."

"Other work?" the Nazi asked sharply.

"Important work," was the instant reply. "And very important work. When you go to that address in Honolulu you will be given a number of water flares, so small that you could carry them all in one pocket and the bulge they made would not be noticed. But they give off a powerful light that burns for four or five hours."

"Water flares?" gasped the Nazi. "For what use?"

"An important use," the Jap replied. "Right now there are three American carriers in the San Diego Basin. You know that yours will sail tonight. Perhaps the other two, with their forces, will sail also. It may be, though, that only your carrier will stop at Pearl Harbor. Later it may meet the other two carriers at sea. You do not know now, and neither do I. However, you can keep our Pacific patrol forces informed of your own position. The water flares. I will explain their use briefly, and the one in Honolulu will give you detailed instructions. It will be an easy matter for you to learn the position of your carrier, and its force. An equally easy matter for you to learn the strength of your force, and whether others have joined it. So! Each evening you will put all that information down on special paper that you will be given in Honolulu, and

put it in a watertight pocket attached to the flare. Then, unseen, you will throw the flare into the water. It is so constructed that it will not break into light for three or four hours. That is so that your carrier will be far out of sight range by then. However, come darkness, all of our submarines will surface to re-charge their batteries. Perhaps one of them will see the flare. Or perhaps one of our long-range patrolling Kawanishi flying boats will sight the flare, and land beside it. Perhaps not the first night you are at sea, or the next, or the next. But one night a flare will be picked up, and we will know all we need to know to set our trap of destruction for a future date."

"That sounds very interesting!" the Nazi said eagerly. "I shall enjoy doing that kind of work. Let us hope that a dozen of their swine carriers make up the force of which mine will be a part!"

"Let us hope so," the Jap replied, with a little laugh that chilled the blood in Dawson's veins, "but let us not count on it. The American dogs are not fools, all the time. We have shown them what happens to fools. But if it be only your carrier, that will be enough. From the information you throw into the water each night we will

be able to guess accurately the destination of the force. Then at the right moment Admiral Shimoda's forces will destroy it completely. The victory will be just what is needed in Japan, and in Germany, too. And the Americans will cease to be so foolishly bold. They will hesitate, and that will give Admiral Shimoda the necessary time he desires to re-enforce his ground forces and break the American grip on New Guinea and the Solomons."

"But if we could get several of their carriers!" the Nazi said fiercely. "We . . ."

"We will hope for that," the Jap stopped him, "but we will be content with one carrier force. It will be enough for the present. Now, before you go I want you to look at this map of Honolulu. I will show you the quickest way to reach the address I have given you. Your carrier may not remain in Pearl Harbor long, so you must not waste time making this important contact."

There was the crackle of paper, the faint shuffling of feet, and then nothing but silence. Dave Dawson took that moment to turn his head slowly until he met Freddy Farmer's wide, angry eyes. But he gazed into Freddy's eyes for only an instant, for he suddenly noticed not four inches from the end of his nose a long quarter-

inch crack between two of the wall boards. Young Farmer spotted it almost at the same time. And holding their breath, the two air aces inched over until they each could put an eye to the crack.

At first Dawson could see nothing but the shadowy interior of a filthy room. Dust, dirt, and dried yellow mud were everywhere. Scraps of rags were strewn all about. And there were several empty rusty cans lying about on the filthy floor. He gave all that but a passing glance, because as his eye became adjusted to the bad light inside he was able to see the head and shoulders of a uniformed figure. His heart leaped up to clog his throat when he saw that it was the uniform of a Naval Aviation Ensign. The man was standing side to, so Dave had only a profile view of the face. And it was a very ordinary face. No single feature stood out prominently. He had seen thousands of faces just like it. He could see, though, that the hair below the service cap was straw-colored, and he guessed that the eyes were sky blue. And the neck, perhaps, was just a little thicker than the average neck of a man of that height.

Of the other figure in the room, though, he could see nothing. No matter how hard he

pressed his eye to the crack, a sliver of wood on the other side of the wall board blocked out everything else.

And then from out of nowhere, it came!

A sixth sense, more than his ears, told him that there was sound and swift movement behind him. He jerked his head around, caught a flash glimpse of Freddy Farmer turning his head, and then the California sky fell down on top of him. All the bombs in the world exploded inside his head, and the whole world was made up only of dazzling white flashes of lightning. But unconsciousness did not engulf him at once. He knew that he was lunging out with both hands, and clawing at rough coarse fabric. He even heard a snarl, a cry of pain, and the scream of a fiend gone completely berserk.

But whether that scream came from his own lips, or from another's, he did not know. A split second later, he didn't know anything at all. The California sky crashed down on him again and drove him deep into a yawning chasm of utter darkness and silence.

CHAPTER FOUR

Vanishing Death

FOR A long, long time Dave Dawson stared at the limitless expanse of cream white. And then little by little the throbbing ache ceased to befuddle his brain, and he became conscious of the fact that the expanse of cream white was the ceiling of a room. He also became conscious of the fact that he was flat on his back in a bed, and that the countless smells of a hospital were in his nostrils. To his right was a window, and when he slowly turned his head on the pillow he found himself staring out at the clear blue, cloudless California sky. He closed his eyes for a moment, but when he opened them again the scene was still the same.

"What the heck!" he heard his own voice mumble. "What happened, and what am I doing in a hospital?"

"Well, it's jolly well time you woke up!"

spoke the voice of Freddy Farmer in his ear. "Don't tell me you got hit that hard. You've been snoring for hours. How are you, old thing?"

Dawson turned his head to the other side and blinked in amazement at young Farmer propped up on one elbow in a bed next to his. Freddy's face was slightly pale around the edges, and there was a patch of surgeon's plaster just above his right eye, but the English-born air ace was grinning from ear to ear.

"Boy, what did you stop with that iron skull of yours, kid?" Dave mumbled. "But never mind that. First tell me what gives around here, anyway? The old brain seems to have gone off on a little solo flight. I can't seem to remember a single thing that . . . Hey! Wait a minute! That shack! We . . ."

"Quite!" Freddy Farmer interrupted with a grimace. "And here we are. You and I are a couple of dopes, Dave. We were so blasted interested in what was going on *inside* that shack that neither of us gave a thought to what was going on *outside*. And so we got bashed good and proper. The blighter wearing civilian clothes did it, I'm sure. The one who was a Jap. I got just a flash look at him before the gun he

held in his hand bounced off your head and connected with mine."

"The dirty rat!" Dawson grated, as more memories came flooding back. "He must have heard us, or seen us through the crack in those wall boards, and slipped out while that other guy was looking at the map. Hey, Freddy! That other guy! He was a Navy pilot! An ensign!"

"I know," Freddy replied grimly. "I saw that, too. And the dirty beggar's Nazi. Gosh, we sure made a mess of things, Dave. I feel like a blasted fool for being caught so easily."

"You don't feel any worse than I do!" Dawson muttered, and gingerly fingered the patch of surgeon's plaster that he discovered on his left temple. "But how did we get here? And it's full daylight outside! Have we been out cold this long, or did we come to and walk back to here? This is the Naval Base Hospital, isn't it? And . . ."

"Slow up, old chap!" Freddy Farmer stopped him with a raised hand. "Don't ask so many questions at once. In fact, just shut up and I'll tell you all I know. I woke up earlier this morning, and an hour or so later Vice-Admiral Carter came in to have a talk with me, and . . ."

"Vice-Admiral Carter?" Dawson gasped, and

half sat up in spite of the stab of white pain that cut through his left temple. "Do you mean the base commandant?"

"Are there two by the same name?" young Farmer snapped. "And will you please shut up while I try to tell you?"

"Okay, okay!" Dave growled. "Go ahead. But skip the trimmings. Just give me the facts."

"I'll give it to you as I jolly well see fit!" Freddy shot right back at him, but tempered it with a grin. "Well, Vice-Admiral Carter came in to find out from me what had happened. Did you know, Dave, that we're mighty lucky to be alive?"

"Well, every time I move my head quick, I don't feel so doggone lucky," Dawson grunted. "Then what?"

"Well, it seems fairly evident that we both would have been done in proper by that Jap, if he had been given more time," young Farmer said. "But it seems that one of the managers of the orange groves happened by just at that moment. He saw the Jap, but didn't recognize him as such. Thought he was a tramp trying to find out what he could steal from the shacks."

"Name one thing that even a tramp would want out of that hole," Dave said. "You saw the

inside, didn't you? And . . . Okay, Okay! I'm sorry, sweetheart. Go ahead and talk."

"Just interrupt me once more with that big mouth of yours, and you can jolly well sing for the truth!" Freddy warned. "Well, he called out to the Jap, and the Jap fired a shot at him. He missed, but the manager didn't give him the chance for a second shot. He dropped flat on his face, and when he got nerve enough to poke his head up for a look, it was just in time to see the Jap, and the chap in uniform, disappear over the brow of the next hill. And when the manager got up enough nerve to give chase — and blessed if I blame him, in view of the fact that *he* had no gun—it was much, much too late. So he came back and found us, listening to the birdies singing, as you would put it. He went down the valley to the nearest phone and called the base. They sent out an ambulance for us. The vice-admiral assured me that neither of us has a fracture of any kind, just a bad bump, so they let us more or less sleep it off."

"Well, that was white of them, anyway," Dave said. "I suppose you told the vice-admiral the story?"

"No," Freddy replied. "I started to, but the old brain was still spinning too much. The vice-

admiral told me to rest up some more, and that he would come back when both of us could talk. I told him about the ensign and the carrier, though. And that worried him no end, too!"

"And why not?" Dawson said, as his heart began to pound. "If this is the next day, then the carrier has sailed!"

"I suppose so," Freddy muttered. "I didn't have the chance to ask the vice-admiral. He left in a hurry, and . . ."

Young Farmer stopped short as the door of their room suddenly opened and the base commandant, followed by a Navy senior surgeon, stepped inside. The grim look on Vice-Admiral Carter's face faded the instant he saw they were both awake. A smile flashed across his rugged face, and he lifted one hand, and gave a little shake of his head.

"Relax, both of you," he said. "We can do without formality here. Well, Dawson, I see that you have come around, too. How do you feel?"

"Not too bad, sir," Dave replied, and grinned. "I'm sorry I wasn't out of it the other time."

"Ah, so Farmer told you of my other visit, eh?" the base commandant murmured, and perched himself on the end of Dawson's bed.

"Well, if you both feel up to it now, I want to have a talk with you. What about it, Commander? Is it all right?"

The vice-admiral addressed the last to the navy surgeon who had entered with him, and he received an immediate reply in the affirmative.

"Oh, yes, sir," the officer said. Then with a little laugh, "They both have pretty tough heads, for which they can certainly be thankful."

"Thankful in more ways than one," the vice-admiral grunted, and Dave had the feeling he was thinking of how that Jap had been scared away from completing the job. "Now," the senior officer continued, and looked from one to the other, "let's have the complete story as nearly as you can remember it. And try to remember everything, if you possibly can. The situation is mighty serious. Mighty grave."

Ten minutes later Dave and Freddy Farmer had finished relating every detail of their experience. Each had confirmed the other's story and had added one or two overlooked details. Vice-Admiral Carter listened through to the very end without once interrupting with a question. Now he sat perched on the end of Dawson's bed balling one clenched fist into the palm of the other hand, and scowling thoughtfully down at his movements.

"There's one thing I want both of you to think about hard," he finally broke the silence. "It's just possible that it may have skipped both your minds thus far. The name of that pilot's carrier. Did he or the Jap mention it?"

Dave and Freddy looked questioningly at each other. Then they both looked at the base commandant and shook their heads.

"No, sir," Dave spoke for them both. "The name of his carrier wasn't mentioned once. But I can tell you what one it was, sir. I mean, he said that it was sailing tonight. I mean, last night. So all you have to do is . . ."

Dawson stopped as the vice-admiral shook his head.

"No, sir?" he echoed.

"No, Dawson," the base commandant said bitterly. "We can't find it out that way, unfortunately. All three carriers sailed last night. That pilot didn't know. He only knew that his carrier was to sail, naturally. But all three were scheduled to sail. And they did."

"But his was sailing for Pearl Harbor, sir!" Freddy Farmer spoke up. "So the one that . . ."

"That's no good, either," the vice-admiral interrupted. "The entire three-carrier force is bound for Pearl Harbor. En route they will work out a battle problem, and then proceed to Pearl

Harbor to take aboard two torpedo and two dive-bomber squadrons, that are waiting there. This ensign pilot—this rotten Nazi—just what did he look like? If either of you can give me a detailed description, perhaps a radio to each of the carriers will make it possible for us to catch our man before the force reaches Pearl. Just what did he look like?"

"That's just the point, sir," Dave Dawson said sadly, when Freddy Farmer didn't speak. "We saw him only in profile, and the light was bad. I didn't see a single thing unusual about him. I mean, sir, he looked just like hundreds of other pilots in Naval Aviation uniform. What about you, Freddy? Did you notice any outstanding features?"

Young Farmer frowned, sighed, and shook his head.

"No, sir," he said to the vice-admiral. "I'm sure I'd be able to recognize him, if I ever saw him again, but I really didn't see anything about him that would help anybody else to identify him."

"Yes, I'm sure I'd be able to spot him again, too," Dawson murmured. Then, with a grim note in his voice, "And that Japrat, too, even though I did only see him at a distance."

The vice-admiral was again scowling down at his clenched fist grinding into the palm of his other hand, and he acted as though he had not heard either of them speak. Dawson waited a few moments, and then asked a question.

"What about the service records of the fighter pilots aboard all three carriers, sir?" he said.

The base commandant raised his head and looked at him sharply.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "And why just the fighter pilots?"

"From the way they talked, sir," Dawson replied quickly, "I felt certain that he was a fighter pilot. I mean, he plans to take off, when the opportunity presents itself, and fly direct to Truk. Well, sir, if he were a torpedo plane or dive bomber or scout bomber pilot, he would have somebody along with him. Gunner, or radio man, or both, I mean, sir. But neither of them made any mention of anybody else. So I feel certain that he's a fighter pilot."

"Yes, I guess you're right there, Dawson," the senior officer said with a nod. "But how would service records help us to find our man?"

"Well, sir," Dave said after a moment of frowning hesitation, "he is obviously German. He probably has a German-sounding name. His

record sheet would tell about his parents. Where they were born, and so forth. He may even be a naturalized American, sir. Of course, it's just a long shot chance, but checking the service records of all the fighter pilots in that carrier force might turn up something that was suspicious-looking."

"It might, but I'm afraid it would be even harder than the needle in the haystack stunt," the base commandant said with a shrug. "Both the Army and the Navy have men of German birth, and parents. And it would take time. All that sort of thing is on file at the Navy Department in Washington. We haven't records that complete here. Of course, though, I'll get the wheels moving on it, at once. I'd be a fool to leave any stone untouched, and unturned. If that devil once . . ."

The senior officer cut himself off with a groan, and his dismay and worry showed plainly on his face.

"There's one thing you might try, sir," Freddy Farmer spoke up hesitatingly. "That is, if you don't mind my suggesting it, sir?"

"Mind?" Vice-Admiral Carter barked. "Good heavens, Farmer, don't stand on formality! If you have anything to suggest, don't hesi-

tate an instant. Suggest it at once. What is it?"

"Recall the force to Dago, sir," Freddy said. "Then Dawson and I could have a look at the fighter pilots. I mean, it might be arranged so that nobody would think anything of it. Perhaps we could pick out your man for you."

"Well, I had thought of that," the senior officer said in a weary voice, "but it can't be done. And for several reasons. The force is not under my command, strictly speaking. I would have to get permission from Washington, or at least from Admiral Nimitz at Honolulu. Also, the force is on close battle schedule right now, and the delay its return would cause would upset plans that have been months in the making. Of course, the seriousness of the situation seems to justify the recall of the force, but it doesn't follow that the recall would definitely solve the problem. You two might not be able to recognize him again. The very fact that the force turned back might make our man suspicious, and he might jump ship. You see we want not only to get our hands on him, but we also want to get our hands on the information that he carries. Then, too, there is his Jap partner in this spy business."

"What about that Jap, sir?" Dawson asked.

"I suppose a hunt for him was started, wasn't it? And was that orange grove manager able to give you any help there?"

"None at all," the base commandant said gloomily. "He didn't get close enough to be able to say definitely whether the man who attacked you two was a Jap, or a Mexican worker. In fact, we only believe that he was a Jap from what you two say."

"He was a Jap, or I never heard a Jap talk," Dawson said with an emphatic nod of his head.

"Quite!" Freddy Farmer echoed. "The beggar was definitely Japanese, sir."

"Oh, I'm not doubting you!" the vice-admiral said quickly. "I believe you completely. But that simply goes to show how hopeless the hunt for him has been, and will be. He may be a Jap, but he may not look one hundred per cent Jap, is what I mean. It's simply another case of the needle in the haystack again. If only you had heard that fighter pilot mention the name of his carrier."

"Yes, but he did not mention it," Freddy Farmer said sadly. "Of that I am positive."

"So am I," Dawson said absently. "I . . ."

He let the rest trail off into silence, and gazed vacantly into space. Vice-Admiral Carter look-

ed at him for a moment, and then leaned forward and tapped him on the knee.

"You've got a peculiar look on your face, Dawson," he said quietly. "Has anything special come to mind?"

Dave wiped the vacant look from his face, looked at the senior officer and smiled.

"Nothing on what's already happened, sir," he said. "But I think there's a pretty fair chance of our catching up with that fighter pilot."

"Then don't beat about the bush with it!" the senior officer snapped. "What? How?"

"If Farmer and I could be relieved of our base duties, sir," Dave said presently, "we could fly to Pearl and get there ahead of the force, go aboard each carrier before any shore leave was granted, and find our man. Naturally, you would have to radio for such permission to be given us, and also for Naval Intelligence to be there on hand to arrest the pilot when we spotted him, and seize his personal effects."

"Naturally I'd relieve you both of your duties here at the base," the vice-admiral said, "but you both happen to be hospital cases. You're in no condition for a flight to Pearl Harbor."

"Why not?" Dave blurted out. "I feel fine. I haven't even got an ache in my head."

"Nor I!" Freddy Farmer spoke up quickly. "Besides, sir, we don't have to take off today. It will take the force some time to reach Pearl. We can stay right here for a couple of days and still get there ahead of it. It would be simple enough to arrange for us to ferry over a Navy bomber, or something, wouldn't it?"

"Farmer is right, sir!" Dawson said eagerly. "We don't have to leave today, or even tomorrow. There's plenty of time to beat the carrier force to Pearl Harbor. And to my way of figuring the thing, we haven't got to do any worrying until the force *does* reach Pearl. That Nazi isn't going to get those water flares until he makes contact with some men in Honolulu. Of course it's really a Naval Intelligence job, but . . . Well, after all, sir, if anybody can identify that fighter pilot, Farmer and I can!"

The vice-admiral regarded them both gravely for a long moment, and then he smiled slowly.

"Even if I didn't know of some of the tough nuts you two have cracked in the past," he said, "I think I would still be inclined to agree to your plan. Very well, then. I'll arrange for you to fly to Pearl in plenty of time to meet the carrier force when it arrives. And I'll make the other arrangements you spoke of, too. Meantime

I'll get out of here, and let you rest up some more. You're a couple of very lucky men. You both had a mighty close call. And in view of the fact that neither of you has eaten since yesterday noon, I guess you could do with a little food as well as rest."

A crack about how Freddy must certainly feel about that last rose to Dawson's lips, but he suddenly realized that he was plenty hungry himself, so he let the remark slide.

"Thank you, sir, for giving us the chance to help," he said instead. "After all, we were both very dumb to let that Japrat put one over on us."

"Quite!" Freddy Farmer said with a grim nod.

"No, I wouldn't say that," the vice-admiral corrected them. "The best of us meet up with that sort of thing, sooner or later. It's not that we're dumb as much as it is that the Japs are sure clever devils. We may call them monkey men, but it's going to take a lot of brains, and a lot of hard, tough fighting, before we sink their rising sun. Well, I must be getting along. Naturally I'll see you both again before you leave. And in case it should skip my mind, I'll say it now. Good luck, and good hunting, to both of you!"

CHAPTER FIVE

Westward Ho!

"PRETTY, PRETTY, hey, kid?" Dawson grunted, and made a sweeping gesture with one hand.

"What is?" Freddy Farmer murmured absently. "Oh, you mean this California scenery? Yes, it's very nice, but stop talking about it so much, will you? You'll have me believing that you are a native of this state."

"No, dopel!" Dave snapped. "I don't mean the scenery, though it really is something. I mean those Flying Fortresses and Liberators, lined up over there. Remember? This is the Los Angeles Air Forces base. We flew up here last night from Dago. We're ferrying one of those jobs out to Pearl. Or don't you remember? Oh, I get it. You're in *that* kind of a daze, huh?"

"What do you mean, that kind of a daze?" young Farmer demanded. "I was just wondering if . . ."

"Sure!" Dawson broke in with a chuckle. "Just what I mean. You're wondering if there's time to slip out to Hollywood so maybe you can get Dorothy Lamour's autograph, and Hedy Lamarr's, and . . ."

"Rot! That's kid stuff!" Freddy snorted as his cheeks went a beet red. "Of course . . . well, I mean, they are both very lovely ladies, and . . ."

"Okay, we'll skip it!" Dave laughed as Freddy started to stammer in his confusion. "We'll pretend you were wondering something else, which your face says you weren't. What was it?"

"Definitely something else, and please go walk into one of those revving propellers, will you!" Freddy said hotly. "Frankly, I was wondering why the vice-admiral sent us up here to fly an Air Forces plane out instead of sending us over by a Navy plane. A Catalina, or a Coronada, for instance."

"I wondered about that myself, for a while," Dave replied, as the smile faded from his lips. "But I think I figured it out."

"All right, master mind!" young Farmer said with a patient sigh when Dawson didn't continue. "I'll be nice and polite, and ask. What did you figure out?"

"That Jap, who hasn't been caught yet, and probably won't be," Dave replied. "He knows very well he didn't kill us, so it's a cinch he figured that we would tell what we knew, which we did. And it's just possible that he was in a position to keep an eye on us. So if he saw us take off in a Navy plane bound for Pearl he would know very well that we heard about his Nazi boy friend heading that way on one of our carriers. I mean, it stands to reason that he doesn't know how much we heard. If he saw us head for Pearl he'd know for sure that we heard plenty, and maybe there is some way he can contact that Nazi. Or even better, contact that rat in Honolulu and have him clear out before the Nazi shows up. In case he's spotted and trailed. See what I mean?"

"Well, you make it just about as clear as mud, but I think I follow you," young Farmer said. "So to throw off the Jap, in case he was watching us, the vice-admiral sent us up here, as though we had been transferred to the Air Forces, eh?"

"Go to the head of the class," Dave said with a nod. "That's just how I figure Vice-Admiral Carter reasoned. To ship us both north to an Air Forces base may give that Jap, if he was watching us, the idea that we hadn't learned a thing."

"Well, we're here, anyway," Freddy Farmer said with a shrug. "A thought comes to me, though."

"Grab it and hang onto it hard, kid," Dawson laughed. "Those things are rare as far as you're concerned, you know."

But Freddy didn't rise to that remark. He stared fixedly at the twenty or more Flying Fortresses and Liberators lined up on the far side of the huge Los Angeles field.

"I wonder if that Nazi fighter pilot *is* aboard one of those carriers?" he suddenly said in a low voice, as though asking himself the question.

Dawson gulped as he suddenly realized that possibility.

"Sweet tripel!" he gasped. "That *is* a thought! Maybe, knowing that we were listening, they decided to take the chance of his going aboard. Maybe they . . . But nuts! That's crazy!"

"How so?" Freddy questioned.

"Well, look at it," Dave argued, and gestured with one hand. "That Nazi was all set as a fighter pilot aboard a Yank carrier. For him to jump ship, and not sail, would make him a marked man for sure. You don't miss your ship, and just walk into the Naval District commandant, and laugh it off. You catch plenty. And in his case, if *he* jumped ship *he* certainly

wouldn't report to the Naval commandant. He'd make tracks in the opposite direction. And his place as a spy in our forces would be gone forever. No, I think he took the chance and sailed with her."

"There's one way we could find out," Freddy said. "Let's phone Vice-Admiral Carter. He can certainly find out in a minute if either of the carriers sailed with a fighter pilot missing. Or if one took a replacement aboard at the last minute."

"Hey, nix!" Dawson cried in alarm. "Call him and find out that a carrier *did* sail with one fighter pilot less? And that there was no sense for us to fly to Pearl? And get recalled to Dago to go on instructing Navy pilots? Are you nuts, Freddy? It may only be Pearl Harbor, but that's twenty-four hundred miles nearer the war than we are right now! Do you want to go back and . . .?"

"No, certainly not, Dave," young Farmer interrupted quietly. "But it doesn't happen to be a matter of where we *want* to go. It's what we can *do* to help. If that Nazi didn't sail, then perhaps the vice-admiral would want us to stick around to maybe identify a suspect that was picked up later. After all . . ."

"Okay, okay, you win!" Dawson groaned. "We better put it up to the vice-admiral, and find out what he has to say about it. We can phone from the Administration Building over there. But if he didn't sail, and we hoof it back to Dago, just don't bother speaking to me for the next twenty years, will you?"

"And will you listen to the chap who just a couple of days ago was quite content to wait patiently for his next good break in this war!" Freddy Farmer jeered as he dropped into step.

"Yeah, but that was a couple of days ago!" Dave growled. "I'm just hoping that the chance hasn't come *and* gone on account of your bright little suggestion."

"Well, I still think we should call him," Freddy said doggedly. "And so do you, and you know it!"

"Oh, go walk a wing!" Dave mumbled. "Sure I do. And that's what burns me up!"

Forty-five minutes later Dawson and Freddy Farmer were back on the flying field, grinning from ear to ear, and walking over toward the Operations Office.

"Boy! Do I feel like a new man!" Dave said, and let out a happy sigh. "I sure was worried while that call was being put through. Not that

I don't like Dago, you understand. It's a swell town, but right now I could do with some of the war."

"Me, too," Freddy said with a chuckle. "To tell the truth I was on pins and needles, too. But everything is all right now. The carrier force sailed with every fighter pilot aboard, so we're to carry on according to plan."

"Check, and double check," Dave echoed, and started up the steps of the Operations Office. "Pearl Harbor, here we come! I hope they give us a good crate to fly. What do you want, Freddy, a Fortress or a Liberator?"

"Either one will suit me," the English-born air ace replied. "Both are pukka airplanes. I..."

Young Farmer stopped short as a field orderly came running up.

"Captains Dawson and Farmer?" he panted when he reached them.

"I'm Dawson," Dave said with a nod. "What's the matter, Sergeant?"

"The Naval Air Base at San Diego just called back," the non-com said. "Vice Admiral Carter wants to speak with either one of you officers."

Dave scowled, and then looked wide-eyed at Freddy.

"What do you suppose now?" he murmured.

Young Farmer shrugged, but a worried look stole into his eyes.

"I haven't the faintest," he said. Then, looking at the non-com, he asked, "Can we take that call in here, or do we have to go over to Administration?"

"I can have it transferred over here, sir," the sergeant said, and pushed open the door of the Operations Office. "Follow me, please."

A few minutes later Dave and Freddy were listening at a single receiver to Vice-Admiral Carter's voice at the other end of the wire.

"I want you two to take off just as soon as you possibly can," the Naval base commandant told them. "Don't delay a minute longer than you have to. I've already spoken to the field commandant there, and he has assured me that you don't have to wait and go with the group that's flying over. So as soon as you hang up get busy, and get on your way. You will be met by a responsible officer when you reach your destination. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," Dawson spoke for the two of them. And then after a split second's hesitation, he added, "May I ask why, sir? I mean, has something unexpected happened?"

"Not exactly," the voice at the other end of

the wire said. "It's simply that I don't want anything unexpected *to* happen. The other one we were hunting down here has turned up. At least it would seem that he has. It was reported to me just ten minutes ago that one of our planes was stolen shortly after you two took off last night."

"A plane swiped?" Dawson blurted out before he could check himself. "What do you mean, sir? Who stole it?"

"Positive identification was not made," the vice-admiral replied. "But the guard, who was wounded, gives a description that might be our man. He was shot through the neck by a man in civilian clothes. The light was bad, of course, and the guard didn't have the chance to get a good look at his assailant, but he says he could be either Mexican, or Jap. And of course he was Jap. *The Jap!*"

"And you mean, sir, you think he's shadowed us up here?" Dawson asked.

"Quite probable, " was the instant reply. "He could land his stolen plane any number of places up there, and not be seen, and make his way to your field on foot. Of course, it may not be that way at all, but we can't take any chances that it isn't. So get going, you two. Get your plane away from there at once, and good luck."

"Yes, sir, and thank you, sir," Dave murmured, and hung up the receiver.

He turned his head and looked at Freddy Farmer's wide eyes, and tried to smile, but it wasn't very much of an effort.

"Well, what do you know?" he breathed. "If it is that rat, then he's a pilot, and he's catching our smoke. Gives you a funny kind of feeling, doesn't it?"

"Quite!" Freddy Farmer grunted, and ran a tongue across his lips. "Makes a chap feel like the witness of a murder, and the murderer still at large, and hunting you down so's you'll never be able to tell."

"Yeah, something like that," Dawson nodded with a shaky little laugh. "But I wonder, though. I mean, we've been here quite a spell, and we haven't bothered looking behind us. *If* he's here, and has his gun, he's certainly had a lot of chances to let us both have it in the back. I wonder why not?"

"Well, stop wondering!" Freddy Farmer muttered, and got to his feet. "Let's do as the vice-admiral orders, and get away from this place."

"But fast!" Dave echoed with a grim nod. "Suddenly I've had all I want of California for a spell, anyway!"

CHAPTER SIX

Invisible Killer

WITH ITS four engines singing a song of power that would be sweet music to the ears of any pilot the Flying Fortress thundered its way southwestward through the night-darkened Pacific sky. The aircraft was on the automatic pilot, and both Dawson and Freddy Farmer sat outwardly relaxed at the controls, but inwardly on the alert for the slightest miss in any of the engines, or for anything that would indicate that all was not as it should be. The Los Angeles Air Forces base was six hours behind them. Another six and they should be over Hickam Field, on Oahu Island, waiting for the permission signal to land.

Suddenly, with a little chuckle, Dawson broke the silence that had existed for some minutes between them. Freddy Farmer glanced across at him with a questioning frown.

"What now, Dave?" he asked.

"Us," Dawson replied, and chuckled again. "I guess we're getting old, Freddy. I mean, we seem to scare pretty easy these days. And I'll admit that I was as jittery as a hen on a hot stove until we got this Fortress off the ground, and into the air. I actually had little chills running up and down my back, as though I expected to feel a nice white-hot bullet cut into it at most any second. But heck! Not a thing happened. I didn't see a thing that looked Jap, did you?"

"No, I didn't," Freddy Farmer replied. "But my imagination certainly gave me a lot of trouble. Every time one of those mechanics put a bag of mail aboard, or a case of those medical supplies we're taking over, I had a brief moment of feeling positive that he was a Japrat, buck teeth, and all. But, as you say, nothing happened."

"Yeah," Dawson murmured, and peered out at the wall of night darkness that completely circled the aircraft. "Just another airplane ride for us. And that doesn't make me mad at all. I wonder if the field radioed Dago when we got off? Vice-Admiral Carter sure sounded plenty worried on that phone."

"Yes, he . . ." Freddy Farmer said, and then cut himself off short.

"What's the matter, Freddy?" Dawson asked, as a sudden clammy sensation rippled through his chest.

"Down there," young Farmer replied, and pointed off and down to the left. "Is that a light blinking, or am I seeing things?"

Dawson leaned forward slightly and stared in the direction of Freddy's pointing finger. A couple of seconds later he saw the unmistakable flashing of a light. Because of the Flying Fortress's altitude it was no more than a pin-prick of light. But it was very real just the same.

"Yes, I catch," he finally grunted. "Probably one of our ships requesting us to flash our identification signal. The heck with them. They should know that no Jap plane could possibly be in this neck of the woods."

"But what if they open fire, if they have flak guns aboard?" Freddy murmured as they both continued to watch the blinking light far below. "There's such a thing as a lucky hit, even at our altitude."

"Okay, if you insist, pal," Dave grunted, and started to reach out his hand. "But . . . Hey! Did you catch that, Freddy? That looked like the old SOS to me."

"It was!" young Farmer replied with a nod, and hunched forward a bit more on his co-pilot

seat. "Wait a minute! He's trying to send something else. K . . . D . . . J? K,D,J? Wonder what that means?"

"Take a look in that signal book in the pocket beside you," Dawson said. "I think those things have surface ship signals as well as aircraft signals. Take a look anyway."

It didn't take young Farmer more than a few seconds to find what he was hunting for. Excitement rang in his voice as he spoke to Dawson.

"Here it is, Dave!" he cried. "K,D,J. Attacked by enemy force! Please give assistance."

"Attacked by enemy force?" Dawson echoed sharply, and squinted hard down at the still blinking pin-point of light." Must be some ship nailed by a Jap submarine. Maybe we'd better slide down for a look. At least that should scare the Jap sub away, if there's one still lurking around. A Jap submarine east of Pearl Harbor? Well, what do you know? Get back at the port gun slot, Freddy, just in case we get the chance to take a crack at something. And I think I'll drop a flare so's we can get a good look."

"No, don't, Dave!" young Farmer said sharply, and gripped his arm as though to restrain him.

"No?" Dawson echoed. "Why not? We won't be able to see much in this dark. And certainly

not a Jap submarine, if there's one on the surface."

"I know," Freddy said with a shrug. "But I've got a funny feeling. A flare would light us up nicely, too, you see? Let's play it cautious, what say?"

"Okay, okay," Dave said with a grin. "Maybe you have got something there. Anyway, get back to the port gun slot, and I'll slide us down a bit."

"Right you are," Freddy said, and slid out of the co-pilot's seat and made his way aft.

Dawson had already throttled the four engines, and was sending the Flying Fortress sliding down through the Pacific night sky in a series of ever widening circles. He circled to port so that he could continually keep his eye on the blinking light that grew bigger and bigger as the Fortress lost altitude. And the light kept on sending two sets of letters. The standard SOS and KDJ. A couple of times Dawson was tempted to signal back that they had caught the signals and were coming down to find out what they could do to help. Each time, though, something seemed to stop him from showing the bomber's signal light. He had even switched off the cockpit light, and he was not allowing the engines to show any exhaust plumes that might reveal the Fortress' exact position.

"Guess I must be as jumpy as Freddy!" he grunted to himself. "But maybe it is best to play it safe, even if it must be one of our surface ships down there. There's no telling what can happen next in this cockeyed world. And, boy, Freddy and I should sure know that by now. Yeah! So we'll sneak down and only let them know where we are by what sounds of our engines they can catch."

With a nod for emphasis, he flipped up the switch of the Fortress' inter-com system, and put his lips to the mike.

"Have you hooked this thing up at your end, Freddy?" he asked into what he guessed was a dead wire.

But he was wrong. Young Farmer's voice was in his earphones instantly.

"Yes, Dave. Can you see anything yet, besides the signal flashes?"

"Nope," Dave replied. "But we're only at eight thousand now. Whoever's signalling is sure a persistent guy, isn't he? Is he so deaf he can't hear us coming down, do you suppose? You haven't caught any different signals, have you?"

"The same two groups of signals over and over again," young Farmer replied. "I fancy they'd stop, though, if we acknowledged. But

I wouldn't, Dave, if I were you. I still have a funny feeling about this business. It just doesn't seem quite right to me, but blessed if I know why. I . . ."

Freddy never finished the rest. He never did for the reason that at that exact moment a stab of orange red flame showed down by the blinking light. Dawson saw it and had only time to stiffen slightly in the seat before the night darkness all about the Fortress was lighted up as brilliantly as high noon by a bursting star shell. And hardly had the white light virtually exploded in front of Dawson's face before the air all about was filled with the roaring thunder of bursting flak shells.

For the infinitesimal part of a split second Dawson sat as a man struck dead. Then with a wild yell he shook himself out of his trance, rammed all four throttles wide open and threw the Flying Fortress up and around in a steep climbing turn. The first star shell had died out by then, but a second and a third one had taken its place, and the silvery brilliance that seemed to flood everything was punched red and orange here and there by flak shells seeking out the Fortress.

"A trap, a trap, and I all but flew right down into it!" Dawson yelled angrily. Then as

he looked down over the side of the plane, cold rage shook him from head to toe. "Freddy!" he shouted into his inter-com mike. "Do you see what I see, Freddy? It's a submarine. A Jap submarine. The dirty rats! They pulled us almost down to the muzzles of their cocked anti-aircraft guns. The stinkers. If they'd waited just a minute longer they couldn't possibly have missed. Hey, Freddy! You okay, kid? Did we get hit by anything?"

"Not that I can see from here!" young Farmer called back. "But I guess my feeling meant something, what? The dirty beggars! I wonder how often they've pulled this killer's trick on lone planes flying out to the Islands? Praise be they're rotten shots. Look! They see that they can't get us now, so they're preparing to dive. They're . . . I say, Dave! What the devil's wrong? Is the plane out of control?"

"Out of control, nothing!" Dawson roared as he sent the huge bomber over on wing, and down. "I mean it to go this way. Show me some of that sweet shooting of yours, Freddy! I'll take you right down on top of them, and nuts to their flak fire. Boy! If we only had a depth charge or two, or a bomb. But give them what you can, Freddy!"

"Right you are!" young Farmer's voice echoed

in Dawson's earphones. "Just get me a little lower, and level us off. I'll make the dirty blighters dance."

The Jap submarine's fire was still pretty heavy, but Dawson sent the Fortress thundering right down through it as though it didn't even exist. The submarine was getting under way, and one by one the deck guns ceased fire as the gun crew quit them and scampered along the wet decks to the conning tower. Two or three of them reached the ladder leading up to the bridge, but that's as far as they got. Freddy Farmer's port-slot fifty-caliber guns started to speak their piece, and the running Japs were knocked flat as though invisible hands had jerked their feet out from under them. Those behind the ones that fell kept on coming like men crazed by fear who didn't know any better. Anyway, they ran straight into the withering fire that had cut down the others, and their rotten lives were promptly snuffed out in exactly the same way.

Not a gun fired back at the Fortress, now, as Dawson kept circling the target so that Freddy could work his slot guns continuously. The undersea craft was driving hard through the water with its diving planes undoubtedly all

set to be run out for a crash dive the instant those who survived the death that sprinkled the deck were inside and the conning tower hatch closed tight. But Freddy Farmer was seeing to it that none of those scampering Japs on deck survived his withering fire. He relentlessly cut them down one after another like tenpins. And then as Dawson veered the Fortress even closer to the trapped submarine, young Farmer sent a hail of explosive bullets practically straight down the still partly opened conning tower hatch.

"Have some of those, you filthy beggars!" Dave heard Freddy's voice screaming over the inter-com. "Pull a trick like that on us, what? Well, how do you like some of the same? How do you like it, what?"

"They don't like it even a little bit, pal!" Dawson shouted impulsively into his own flap mike. "Not even a . . . Hey! Ye gods! You've hit something, Freddy!"

Hit something was right! A column of livid red flame suddenly belched up out of the conning tower hatch. The silver light from the floating exploded star shells had just about died away; but now the sky and the sea were bathed in a blood red glow as the column of flame

mounted higher and higher, and then fountained outward in all directions. It came so close to the circling Fortress that Dawson gasped out a strangled cry of alarm and quickly banked off in the opposite direction. As soon as he was clear of the area of falling fire he banked the Fortress again so that he could look back at the doomed Jap submarine.

And doomed it was. Even as he saw it again there was another violent internal explosion that seemed to lift the craft clean out of the water. It actually seemed to hover motionless in mid-air for a moment, and although Dawson was not sure, he thought he saw the thing break in half, and both halves fall back into the water with mighty splashes, and then disappear completely beneath the flame-tipped waves. At any rate, an instant later the submarine just wasn't there any more. There was nothing but a blazing whirlpool of oil to mark the spot where it had been. There was not even a single piece of floating wreckage in that ever widening circle of blazing oil.

"And that's one Tojo can sure mark off as gone for good!" Dawson muttered, and nosed the Fortress up for altitude. What a way to die, even for a dirty Japrat."

With a little shuddering shake of his head he took his gaze off the blazing patch of oil slick, and turned his attention forward.

"Okay, Freddy, boy!" he called into his inter-com mike. "Come on up front and get your cigar for hitting the bull's-eye. And how you did, pal. How you did!"

There came no reply from Freddy over the inter-com, nor did the English youth come up forward in person.

"Hey, Freddy!" Dave shouted, this time even louder. "Can you hear me? Anything wrong back there? Hey, Freddy!"

Ten full seconds of silence ticked by, and an eerie chill started to close about Dawson's heart. Why hadn't Freddy at least answered if he wasn't coming forward just yet? Was something wrong? Had a chance shot from that rotten Jap submarine nailed old Freddy? But that couldn't be. He'd heard Freddy's port-slot guns still slugging away long after the last gun on the submarine had gone silent. Then what was wrong?

Those, and a hundred and one other torturing thoughts raced through Dawson's brain as he put the Fortress back onto the automatic pilot, unhooked his safety harness, and scrambled out of the seat and went aft. As he pushed through

the door leading into the bomb bay he stopped dead in his tracks and then instantly dropped flat on his hands and knees. A sea of acrid smelling smoke had come swirling through the compartment door opening, and although his own heart seemed to be pounding against his very eardrums he was able to hear the faint crackling of flames. And he could see that the swirling smoke inside the bomb-bay was tinted by fire.

"Freddy! Freddy!" he bellowed at the top of his lungs. "Are you trapped in there? Can you hear me? Where are you, Freddy?"

"Back here, Dave!" came the muffled reply through the swirling smoke. "Give me a hand, quick. The mail sacks. The blasted things are on fire. Mind the bomb-bay doors, Dave! I've opened them to toss these things out. Give me a hand, Dave. I don't think I can make it alone. Blast! That thing's hot!"

Long before Freddy Farmer had stopped speaking Dawson was crawling through the door opening on his hands and knees. It was like crawling into the middle of a blast furnace. The acrid smoke stung his eyes and almost blinded him. It seemed to pour down his throat and gag him, and he was frightfully afraid that he might misjudge his movements and go hurtling down

through the opened bomb-bay doors.

But he did not misjudge, and after what seemed an eternity spent inside a hot stove, he reached Freddy Farmer, who was hauling smoking and flaming mail sacks along the floor of the compartment and then dropping them down through the opened bomb-bay doors. Young Farmer looked like a smudged-faced ghost in the red glow of the burning sacks. His helmet and goggles were gone, and his flying suit was badly scorched in a couple of places.

"What happened, Freddy?" Dawson choked out as he grabbed a smoking mail sack off the pile and hurled it down toward the night-shrouded Pacific. "We stop some of their flak? But how the dickens did these sacks catch on fire?"

"Don't know!" Freddy choked through the smoke. "Can't understand it. Just happened to look back in here to check if anything had been hit, and found the whole blasted place full of smoke. Saw a couple of stabs of purple light, and then the whole business broke into flame. Didn't dare waste time calling you. Think the fire got the inter-com wires, anyway. Boy! Suppose I hadn't happened to look in here!"

Dawson simply shuddered and dragged

another sack off the pile. He didn't bother to make any comment. It was horrible enough just to think about the whole rear end of the Fortress catching fire. Besides, there was too much of the stinging smoke in his nose and throat to permit any unnecessary talk. They still weren't out of danger. No, not by a jugful. At that very moment, as Dawson kicked a smoking sack toward the bomb-bay opening, a tongue of purple white light shot out of its heavy canvas covering. A hissing sound filled Dawson's ears, and then the mail sack went tumbling down through the air. Dave's breath seemed to stick in his throat, and his heart turn to stone, as the terrible realization came to him. He heard Freddy Farmer cry out in stunned amazement but he could not have turned his head Freddy's way at that moment, even if not doing so had cost him his life. Half frozen with fear, he stood gaping at the bomb-bay opening down through which the flaming mail bag had just disappeared.

Then, snapping out of his trance, he whirled around and practically threw himself at the three or four smoking mail bags left. Fire burned his hands a little, but he hardly felt the pain. His only thought at that moment was to get

every last one of those mail bags out of the plane. And a few moments later the last one of them went spinning down through the opening out of sight. By then an up-draft had cleared away most of the smoke. For a moment Dawson and Freddy Farmer stared at each other in the pale glow of a single bulb in the compartment ceiling that had not been reached by the flames. Then, as though still in a trance, Dawson reached out and pushed the button that closed the bomb-bay doors. And then the two of them more or less reeled back to the pilot's compartment and dropped gasping for air into their seats.

"The first aid kit, beside you, Freddy," Dawson finally managed to force the words from his lips. "Better get it out and use some of the tannic jelly on our hands. No sense taking chances. Good grief, Freddy! There were time fire bombs in some of those sacks. Somebody figured to make us bail out, and flame this thing down onto the deck!"

"Yes!" Freddy Farmer said in a tight voice. "A little Jap friend of ours. Who else could it have been? It couldn't have been anybody else, Dave. The dirty blighter. He probably didn't trouble to use his gun. Didn't even have to get

close to us . . . But, good gosh, Dave! How in the world did he get the chance to do it? How did he know when he shadowed us up to Los Angeles that we were going to take the very first plane off, and that we'd carry the mail?"

"I don't know," Dawson mumbled, and rubbed some of the tannic jelly on his smarting hands. "It's like one of those impossible cock-eyed things you read in dime thrillers. Maybe he didn't do it, himself. Maybe he has pals at the L.A. Base. He certainly had one at Dago. Maybe he didn't even show his face to anybody, except a pal or two of his. And maybe we're just kidding ourselves. Maybe he didn't have a thing to do with it. Maybe it was just plain sabotage by some other rats he never even met. I—gosh! I'm almost beginning to feel sorry that you belted that submarine down to the bottom, Freddy. Believe it or not, those rats, while trying to knock us down with their little trick, actually saved our lives."

"What's that?" Freddy asked sharply. "Dirty Japs save anybody's life? Not a bit, they would!"

"Not knowingly, no," Dawson said, and absently checked the course of the Fortress that was still droning along on the automatic pilot. "But those submarine birds did, just the same.

Supposing that sub hadn't showed at all? Supposing you hadn't gone back to work the guns, and looked into the bomb-bay? We would suddenly have found ourselves sitting on the front end of a flying ball of fire. See what I mean?"

"Too vividly!" young Farmer said with a violent shudder. "Why, the blasted fire might even have reached the gas tanks before we could have bailed out. Gosh! maybe I am a little sorry that I sent the lot of them to the bottom."

"Well, don't be too sorry," Dawson said grimly. "They're still Japs. And there's still a lot of their cutthroat brothers on the face of the earth that need the same kind of treatment."

"And will get it, too, if I have anything to do with it!" Freddy Farmer echoed, tight-lipped.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Spy Trap

THE NEW dawn sun was well up over the eastern rim of the world and was driving the shadows of night over the western lip in a hurry when Dave Dawson and Freddy Farmer sighted the flight of American patrol planes. They were Navy long-range Catalina flying boats and they were coming straight on toward the Flying Fortress.

"Nice!" Dawson grunted with a nod of his head. "That's something I was hoping that we'd see just about now. Asleep at the switch once, maybe, but not twice. Nope, not a chance."

"All of which sounds very interesting," Freddy Farmer murmured, and rubbed a dirty hand over his tired-looking face. "But do you mind explaining what you mean? I'm afraid I'm a little bit too done in this morning to bother making guesses. What about those Catboats, Dave?"

"That they're there, and coming toward us

on a beeline," Dave replied with a nod toward the approaching flying boats. "It means that they are sure on the alert at Pearl Harbor, these days. Obviously they picked us up on radar, and radioed those patrol planes to come out for a look at us. In other words, there'll never be a second sneak attack on the Hawaiians."

"Oh, I see," Young Farmer grunted. "Yes, I guess you're right. I fancy that . . . oh-oh. Half a minute, Dave. They're on the radio. I'll handle it, if you wish."

Dawson nodded and watched the three Catalinas move into line formation. The request for an identification signal was already sounding in his earphones.

"Sure, go ahead, kid," he said. "But watch your English accent. They might wonder, and start to get funny. And I don't want to play around any more. I want just to get my feet on firm, hard ground for a change."

Freddy Farmer made a face at him, and then put his lips to the radio mike.

"Fortress to Catalinas!" he barked. "Plane XFT, Captain Dawson in command. Request permission to proceed to destination Four-Seven-Six. Over!"

There was a moment of silence; then they both heard the reply.

"Patrol to XFT! Proceed to destination. Welcome. Did you have a nice trip? Over!"

Freddy Farmer glanced at Dawson out the corner of his eye, and grinned impishly.

"XFT to Patrol!" he called out. "A jolly fine trip, old tin of fruit. Top-hole, really, what? Really a bit of all right, I fancy, old bean! Off!"

Young Farmer started to switch off but at that instant came sharp words from the Catalinas.

"Patrol to XFT!" the voice crackled in their earphones. "Who is that talking? I thought you said Captain Dawson was in command."

Dave quickly shook his head as Freddy started to reply. He spoke into the radio mike, instead.

"Captain Dawson speaking, sir," he said. "And I am in command of this aircraft. That was an English refugee who gave you our identification. Name of Captain Farmer. Sorry he hasn't been able to master the language yet, sir. If you were to meet him, and see what he looks like, you'd understand."

Laughter burst out in the earphones, and thunderheads clouded up in Freddy Farmer's eyes. He glared at Dawson, but after a moment or two he smiled sheepishly.

"All right, all right," he said in a resigned voice. "I should have known that I couldn't top

you blasted Yanks in such a situation. I'll not forget it, my lad, though. Just remember that!"

Dawson chuckled, and made a face. Then the two of them watched the three Catalinas swing gracefully away and go back onto their patrol course. Some twenty minutes later they picked up Diamond Head on the Island of Oahu, and shortly after that they were circling slowly over Hickam Field, waiting for permission to land.

"You know, Freddy," Dave murmured as he stared down at the huge military aviation base, "in a way the Japs almost did us a favor by pulling that sneak attack. Take a look down there. That's really something, now, isn't it? The very latest of everything. No long lines of planes, now, to make perfect strafing targets. Every single plane dispersed just as it should be. And look at those flak batteries, will you! Boy! A mosquito's life wouldn't be worth a thin dime around here, once those guns opened up."

"Yes, the chaps are certainly ready and prepared for anything and everything now," Freddy Farmer said softly, and let his gaze wander. "But what a blasted shame they had to be caught off guard that day. The one thing that amazes me, though, is the way you Yanks can dig in and clear up things. I declare you'd never guess, now, that such terrible damage had

been done that way. It's positively amazing, really."

"Just an old American custom, Freddy," Dave said lightly. "When we really start to do a thing, we do it, trimmings and all. We don't kid around. We roll up our sleeves, and . . ."

"I know, I know!" Freddy cried with a wave of his hand. "You Yanks are positively wonderful. That is, next to the British, of course. Now, there is a people who . . ."

"And there is the signal to come on in!" Dawson interrupted. "And praise Allah for that! But tell me about the British people again sometime, will you, pal? Say about ninety-nine years from now, huh?"

"What a shame I haven't my usual strength this morning!" young Farmer growled. "If I had, you'd go down by 'chute, and I'd take this thing in."

Dave laughed, and then concentrated on circling into the wind and sliding the Flying Fortress down to a perfect landing on the strip ordered by the officer in the control tower. As soon as the huge craft came to a full stop both youths breathed deeply, and then grinned at each other.

"Feels good, doesn't it, Freddy, huh?" Dawson said.

"Don't think it ever felt so good before," young Farmer agreed instantly. "English-born I may be, but I'm afraid I'm definitely not a follower of the sea. I always feel much better when there is the ground underneath me."

"Well, it's there under us now, and both of us are stationary, praise be!" Dawson said. "And between you and me, if there wasn't anybody looking, I'd get down on my hands and knees and kiss it, I feel so good to be here. Frankly, this flight's one that I'd like to forget in a hurry. And that's no kidding, either."

"Definitely not!" young Farmer echoed. Then with a frown he said, "But that business last night still bothers me. Somehow, I just can't see how that Japrat we met at San Diego could possibly have had anything to do with it. Just sabotage, I think, and we happened to be the two unlucky ones who took this aircraft off the L.A. base field."

"Maybe," Dawson said with a shrug. "But until I get a better explanation I'm going to continue to pin it on that Japrat. Anyway, here we are, and that Japrat back at Dago is a forgotten issue, as far as I'm concerned. Now it's for that dirty Nazi in a Yank Naval Aviation uniform, the stinker."

"Quite," Freddy Farmer murmured. "And

here comes the reception committee, or something. Looks like they don't trust you to taxi this thing in. The signal tower says for us to stay put. Just as well, too. You can mess up an airplane even on the ground, you know."

Dawson had a fitting crack to that remark, but he sighed and let it go unspoken. An Air Forces jeep had come rocketing out to the Flying Fortress, and braked to a stop just under the left wing. Dave half waved at the occupants of the jeep, three Air Forces officers and a Navy commander, and then slid out of his seat, and made his way aft to the belly exit of the plane.

A couple of minutes later they were facing the wide-eyed stares of the jeep's riders.

"I'm Captain Larkin, duty officer," one of the Air Forces officers said. "But, what happened to you two? You run into trouble? From here you look like you bumped into the whole Jap air force."

"We had a little trouble," Dawson said with a grin. "But..."

That's as far as he got. The Navy commander gave a sharp shake of his head, and stepped forward.

"Sorry, Captain Larkin," he said with a pleasant smile, "but these two are to report to

Vice-Admiral Stone at once. Any report is to be made to him."

Captain Larkin frowned, then shrugged and returned the other's smile.

"Yes, of course, Commander," he said. "I understand. But . . . well, let it go. Welcome to Hickam, you two. If you get the chance, drop back over here and tell us what's new on the mainland, eh?"

"We'll do that, if we get the chance," Dawson assured him.

"Oh, quite," Freddy Farmer murmured.

And then the Navy commander took charge of them. He introduced himself as Commander Drake, and he talked pleasantly of everything save their flight to Oahu as he led them off the field and over to a waiting Navy car, with a rating at the wheel.

"Sorry to choke things off that way," he said as they climbed in. "But the vice-admiral's orders were that you were to talk to no one. Not even to me. So we'll get going, and then you can report all to the vice-admiral. And from the looks of you, I hope he permits me to remain and hear it."

"Where is the vice-admiral, sir?" Dawson asked as the Navy rating behind the wheel

shifted the car into gear, and got it rolling.

"The Kaneohe Naval Air Station on Mokapu Point," the commander replied. "It's a few miles, but one of the prettiest drives on the Island. You'll see some of the real Hawaiian scenery."

They did. But reaction was catching up with Dave Dawson and Freddy Farmer. And fatigue, too. And so they were really too worn out from their harrowing experiences of the night to be able to pay proper attention to the gorgeous scenery that rolled by on either side of the car. As a matter of fact, Freddy Farmer fell sound asleep twice. And Dawson caught his own eyelids sagging a few times. Obviously Commander Drake noticed these signs, because when they rolled through the gates that opened onto the Kaneohe Naval Air Station, he ordered the rating at the wheel to drive them to his own quarters, instead of to the commandant's office.

And when they reached the commander's quarters they were treated to that special brand of thoughtfulness and courtesy for which the U.S. Navy is so famous. Commander Drake played the magician in the fullest meaning of the word. He produced warm baths for the two dead tired pilots, clean fresh uniforms for both

of them, a pharmacist's mate to check their burns and fix them up, and last but not least as far as Freddy Farmer was concerned, a breakfast such as you probably wouldn't get even in the White House. And not once did he bother them with questions, or even act as though he couldn't keep his tongue still any longer. In short, by the time the Navy officer took them over to meet the station commandant he had made himself their friend for life, and they both felt as though they had just got up from a perfect night's sleep, instead of having just completed a nerve-racking twenty-four hundred and two mile flight.

"If you don't mind my saying so, sir," Dawson said as he breathed deep of the invigorating Hawaiian air, "you're a miracle man, if I ever met one. I was dreading trying to keep awake while I made my report to the vice-admiral, but now I feel like a million dollars. And not a cent under it."

"Quite, sir!" Freddy Farmer echoed instantly. "I only hope that some day Dawson and I will have the opportunity to do the same for you."

"Well, thanks, but I hope not," Commander Drake said with his pleasant laugh. "Of course, I'd love to be your guests at your air base some

day. But definitely not in the condition you two were in. You sure gave me a start when you climbed down out of that Fortress. You gave all of us a start for that matter."

Dawson grinned, and then his grin faded as memory started to return.

"Well, it was sure one of the happiest landings I ever made, I can tell you that, sir," he said soberly.

"Amen," Freddy Farmer echoed just as soberly.

That ended the conversation between them, for they had reached Vice-Admiral Stone's office, and the station commandant had risen from behind his huge desk and was smiling his greeting while at the same time faint puzzlement played about in his steel blue eyes.

"Glad to meet you, Captains Dawson and Farmer," he said, and shook hands with them both. "Be seated, please. No, Commander, don't leave. I think you'd better listen in on this. You had some trouble, Captains?"

As the station commandant spoke the last he glanced down at the hands of the two air aces, and the strips of surgeon's plaster that showed white against the sun- and wind-bronzed skin.

"A little trouble, sir, yes," Dawson answered

for both of them. Then, lifting his hands a little, "But luckily we came through it with no more than these, and a pretty ticklish few minutes."

"I'm glad of that," the vice-admiral replied. Then as he seated himself at the desk, he said, "But we'd better keep things in order. Naturally, I know something of what happened. I mean, over on the mainland. Vice-Admiral Carter radioed me in code. It would be better, though, for you two to tell it to me in your own words. Begin right at the beginning, and don't leave out anything, if you can possibly help it."

Twenty minutes later Vice-Admiral Stone and Commander Drake knew as much of what had happened as Dawson and Farmer knew themselves. Silence settled over the room, and all four frowned deep in thought.

"There's a question I'd like to ask, sir," Freddy Farmer spoke up. "Something that's been bothering me. Probably unimportant, but . . . well, I'd like to ask it, if you don't mind, sir?"

"Of course I don't," came the instant reply. "Go right ahead, Captain Farmer. What is the question?"

"The business during the flight across, sir," the English-born air ace said. "Do you . . .? I mean, do you think it was just accidental sabo-

tage? That is, as far as Dawson and I are concerned? Or do you really think that that Jap followed us north and was instrumental in having those time fire bombs put in the mail sacks?"

The frown that already knitted the vice-admiral's brows deepened and he did not answer for a moment or two.

"We will probably never learn one way or the other, Captain Farmer," he finally said slowly. "But my personal feeling is that the Jap is, or was, the skunk in the woodpile. The longer this war goes on the more amazed I become at the fiendish, devilish ingenuity of the Japs, once they put their minds to it. In countless things they are unquestionably the stupidest people on the face of the earth. But for devilish tricks that have to do with torture, maiming, and ruthless slaughter, they are the world's best. They could give lessons to the Nazi Gestapo and Secret Service any time. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't be at all surprised if the Nazi cunning in the matter of booby traps actually originated in Tokyo. So I'd say, yes, Captain Farmer. I'd say that mail sack business was definitely linked to that Jap spy."

"Thank you, sir, for your opinion," Freddy Farmer said with a smile. Then he added in a

brittle voice, "I sincerely hope that I meet up with that blighter again. Under more favorable circumstances, of course."

"And I hope you do," the vice-admiral said with a grave nod. "But there is something you must keep in mind every minute of the time until your special mission is accomplished. It's that that spy is but one of many. Bluntly, you two are marked men. I don't mean to alarm you unnecessarily, but you both bumped into something that is of vital importance to the Japanese command in the western Pacific. You *know* that there is a dangerous Nazi spy, serving as a fighter pilot aboard one of our newest and most powerful carriers. We must accept the undoubted fact that the Jap at Dago, and that Nazi, now at sea, believe you two heard much of their conversation there in that shack. That the Nazi was not arrested when he went aboard his ship simply proved to them that you did not know his name. But remember this! The Jap in question obviously followed you to the Los Angeles base. Maybe he did put those time fire bombs in the mail sacks, hoping that you both would lose your lives en route to Hawaii. And maybe he didn't. But either way it doesn't make much difference. I mean, we have got to assume that the

Jap knew you were heading for Hawaii, and why! In short, to identify this Nazi when his carrier arrives."

"But why does that make us marked men, now that we are here, and not back on the mainland, sir?" Freddy Farmer asked with a frown.

"I think I can answer that, Freddy," Dave Dawson spoke up with an apologetic glance at the senior naval officer. "Because of what Vice-Admiral Stone just told us. That our little Japrat is not the only Jap around. He may have spies of his own right here in the Hawaiians. And there's such a thing as short-wave radio, you know. To play it safe . . . I mean, in case we did reach Hawaii, which we have, he might radio one of his pals to do what he wasn't able to do. And to do it before that Nazi carrier put in to Pearl. Isn't that what you had in mind, sir?"

"That is it, exactly, Captain Dawson," the vice-admiral said, giving him a nod of approval. "You two, and you two alone, can block this thing. So until the force puts into port, which will be the day after tomorrow, you are marked men. At least we have got to assume that such is the case, until we know better. And that brings us up to the matter of the carrier force arriving,

and you identifying this Nazi for us . . . if you can."

The senior officer paused and stared at them both a little hopefully. Dawson grinned and nodded.

"We'll spot him, sir," he said with all the assurance in the world in his voice. "We didn't get much of a look at him, and nothing that we saw of him stood out in a noticeable sort of way. But I know very well, sir, that I'll recognize him when I see him again."

"And so will I, sir," Freddy Farmer echoed with a confident nod. "It's just one of those things that a chap can't put into words. I mean, I couldn't for the life of me tell you *why* I'll be able to recognize him, but I know that I will."

"Well, you'll both certainly get all the chance in the world to do just that," Vice-Admiral Stone said.

"And it will be a happy moment when we see your men take him in charge, sir," Dawson said grimly. "I'll er—no, sir?"

Dave stumbled, and mumbled the last as he saw the station commandant shake his head.

"No, we're not going to do it that way," the Navy officer said. "Oh, we'll grab him in time, but not the very next moment after you point

him out to us. You're forgetting that address over in Honolulu, whatever it is. You will point him out to us, but in such a way that he'll never suspect. We plan to let him leave ship unmolested. It is our plan to trail him to his destination, and . . . well, the rest is obvious, isn't it? We'll catch the lot of them. Instead of catching just one Nazi spy, we'll clean out an entire nest of them that is still causing us concern here on Oahu, almost three years after Pearl Harbor."

As Vice-Admiral Stone spoke the last he glanced over at Commander Drake, and nodded. The junior officer returned the nod.

"Let us hope so, sir," he said quietly, but with a certain grimness in his voice. "Nothing I'd like better than to smoke them out into the open."

Vice-Admiral Stone saw the questioning looks that came to Dawson's and Farmer's faces, and he hastened to explain.

"Commander Drake is chief of Naval Aviation Intelligence, here on Oahu," he said. "During the last few months a couple of things have happened that shouldn't have happened. Sabotage, missing papers of importance, and that sort of thing. The commander has been in charge

of breaking the thing, and has made some arrests. Japs every time. Born and raised here in the Islands, but still Japs. Didn't do any good, though. Every one of them killed himself rather than talk and save his life. They actually killed each other. A suicide pact. I'll spare you the gory details. All we were able to learn was that the root of the whole business, the main nest, is somewhere in Honolulu. But Honolulu is a fairly big place. So, naturally, we are hoping that your lead will take us straight to that spot, and make it possible for us to wipe out the menace once and for all."

"I see, sir," Dawson said after a moment's silence hung over the room. "But you spoke of pointing him out so's he wouldn't suspect. Just how, sir? He probably got a look at us, at the time that Jap was scared off before he could finish us. So when he sees us come aboard his carrier, whichever one it is, he'll know us instantly. I mean, even if no move is made toward him, he'll certainly know *why* we are there. And later he's bound to guess that we pointed him out so that he could be followed. Or am I getting this all mixed up?"

"No, you make your point clear enough," the vice-admiral said with a smile. "But we're not

going to advertise it as much as that. You two will see him, I hope. But he certainly won't see you. I've got all that arranged, so don't worry. You'll get a good look at every fighter pilot in the three-carrier force, but not one of them will even know that either of you are aboard. Just leave that part to me, and don't worry. I'll explain my little plan later. Right now, I guess we've talked things over enough for the first meeting. You two could do with some rest and relaxation. So I'll say again that I'm very pleased to meet you, and express my sincere hope that we can clean up all this very dirty business within the next seventy-two hours. Meantime, I'm turning you over to Commander Drake. He'll act as the Navy's official host during your stay here on the Islands."

The vice-admiral stood up, and smiled. The other three stood up, saluted, and then went outside.

"Well, what will it be first, Captains?" Commander Drake asked when they reached the golden sunshine. "Feel like a sight-seeing tour about the Station, a little nap, or what?"

"Those eggs we had for breakfast, sir," Freddy Farmer said with a sheepish smile. "The way they were cooked. I've never tasted anything so delicious. I . . ."

Dave Dawson groaned aloud and shook his head sadly.

"Here we go again, Commander," he said. "You might just as well get used to it. There are perpetually three things that Farmer always wants to do most. One is eat, two is to eat some more. And three is to eat again. It's a habit that will never be broken, I'm afraid. So we might just as well humor him, or we'll have a terrible grouch for company."

"Rubbish!" Freddy Farmer snapped angrily. But just the same, he looked hopefully at Commander Drake. And then grinned broadly when the Naval officer nodded, and started leading the way over to his quarters.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Black Lightning

"WHAT DO you say, Dave; stop this blasted thing for a moment, what?" Freddy Farmer said. "I'm coming loose at the joints. Besides, this is a beautiful spot. What is it anyway, do you know?"

"The beach at Kahuku Point," Dawson replied as he guided the jeep in which they were riding to the side of the road, and braked it to a stop. "And you're right, Freddy, this is some spot. With that half-moon hanging up there in the sky, it's just like a picture from the brush of a great artist."

"Well, strike me pink!" young Farmer gasped as he climbed out of the jeep and gazed at Dawson. "The chap seems to have some beauty and romance in his soul after all!"

"And nuts to you!" Dave snapped as he climbed down, too. "Can't a fellow admire some-

thing without being taken for a guy with long hair who lives in a garret?"

"But the way you said it, Dave," Freddy Farmer said with a sly look in his eyes. "So soft and so deep. Do you write poetry, too, my good man?"

"Look, dime a dozen!" Dawson grated. "It was your idea to take this jeep trip around the island. So don't start any of that stuff with me. I simply said that this was quite a spot. And it is, *see?*"

"Right you are, Dave, right you are, old thing," young Farmer laughed. "I simply couldn't pass by the chance to pull your leg a bit. First time I ever heard you admit there were such things as moons, and what not. Just shows there is another side to you. And I like that side, *too*. So am I forgiven?"

"Aw, go spin a wing!" Dawson growled, but he grinned and gave Farmer a playful punch in the ribs. "Fact is, Freddy, nobody can be hard-boiled in the Islands. There's something about them that would break down the toughest egg that ever came down the pike. I've seen a few places in this old world in my few years, but somehow the Hawaiians always remain at the top of the list."

"Yes, they really are quite something, I must admit," Freddy murmured as he gazed about at the faintly silver-washed scenery. "I'm fair to being in love with them myself. What say we take a walk back along the road a ways? Or should we be getting on back to the Kaneohe Naval Air Station?"

Dawson glanced down at his wrist watch and shook his head.

"It's early," he said. "We've got lots of time. And I don't think Commander Drake will be mad at all if we stay out of his hair for a spell longer. Now, there is one swell guy, isn't he, Freddy? I went for him one hundred per cent the moment I laid eyes on him."

"A very pukka chap, and no doubt of it!" Freddy Farmer agreed instantly, and dropped into step. "We've probably bored him to tears, but he hasn't shown it for a single second. Always ready to please. Always eager to do anything to help us pass the time. That day yesterday with him is one I'll always remember. Don't believe there's a blasted thing left on this island that he hasn't shown us. A very, very top-hole gentleman, for fair."

"That, and more," Dawson grunted. "But I've a hunch he got a kick out of it too, taking

us on the sight-seeing rounds. If only because it got his mind off other things. The commander is worried about the spy business here in the Islands. There are no two ways about that. If we don't spot that Nazi tomorrow when the carrier force comes in, he's going to take it like a mule's kick in the face."

"I fancy we'll feel much the same way ourselves," Freddy Farmer murmured. "Makes me almost afraid to have tomorrow come. And for two reasons, too."

"One is maybe we won't find the guy," Dawson said. "What's the other?"

"That we'll find him, and then that will be that," young Farmer replied after a moment's pause. "I mean, our job will be all washed up. I gathered that Vice-Admiral Stone expects us to go back to the mainland on the next plane, after this business is all taken care of."

"Yeah, I got the same idea," Dave said gloomily. "And it's been bothering me. I'll hate like sixty to go back to instructing. To tell you the truth, once this business is all settled, I'm going to go to the vice-admiral and see if I can't get him to arrange for us to be sent to the Southwest Pacific war zone. Anyway, some place other than back to the mainland."

"I doubt that you'll have any luck," Freddy Farmer sighed. "Technically, the vice-admiral hasn't anything to say about where we go next. We are Air Forces, you know. Loaned to Naval Aviation for instruction duty. Orders for us to proceed to any fighting zone would have to come from the Air Forces Command, not the Navy."

"Right, but did you have to bring it up?" Dawson groaned. "However, this business isn't cleared up yet. I've got me a funny feeling, I have."

"Was there ever a time when you hadn't?" young Farmer shot right back at him. "What's it this time? That we're going to fail tomorrow?"

Dawson didn't reply for a moment. He walked along the moonlit and shadowed road, hands jammed in his pockets, and a faraway look in his eyes.

"Yeah, Freddy," he eventually said slowly, "I guess you could put it that way. I've been making the old brain wheels spin over in high gear on all this business. And I stumbled on one little item that maybe throws the whole thing out of whack. Time."

"Time?" Freddy Farmer questioned with a frown.

"Yeah, time," Dawson said. "No matter how

you look at it, the carrier force was far at sea when you and I stopped hearing the birdies sing. And . . .”

“But you said . . .!” young Farmer began.

“I know,” Dawson stopped him. “I said that being as how things were all arranged, they probably took a chance and had that Nazi spy go back aboard his ship. But later, when the Jap guessed that we were going to do things about it, he stopped taking chances.”

“You certainly don’t make sense,” Farmer growled. “But if you’re referring to the Nazi spy, no matter what the Japrat decided, or didn’t decide, the Nazi was far at sea by then. And on his way to Pearl Harbor.”

“Correct,” Dave grunted. “But there was the item of that guy in Honolulu. Oh sure, we may spot the Nazi tomorrow, but I don’t think *he’ll* lead Commander Drake and his men to the Honolulu address. And even if he should, Commander Drake won’t find anybody there.”

“You’re crazy!” Farmer snorted.

“Okay, so I’m crazy,” Dave said placidly. “But that’s the way I feel just the same. Dog-gone it, Freddy, the thing is just too open and shut, as far as we’re concerned. I mean, we hold all the cards. And nothing ever works out that

way. The stakes are too high for it to come off that way!"

"Rubbish!" young Farmer snorted again.

"You think so?" Dawson murmured, and turned his head to look at him. "Okay, then. Figure it this way. One, that Japrat was smooth enough to hear us outside that shack, and catch us with our flaps down. Two, he was smooth enough to swipe a plane and chase us up to L.A. Three, he was smooth enough to slip time fire bombs into the mail sacks aboard the Fort we were to fly. Four . . . But skip the rest. Do you think he's not also smooth enough to somehow get word to his Honolulu man, so that this end of the business won't go boom along with that Nazi spy? Do you think he's dumb enough to risk the loss of an important spy contact here in the Islands by just hoping that his Nazi spy won't be nailed? If you do, you're nuts, is all I've got to say. And what's more, I'd like to lay a little bet that he *also* gets word to the Nazi spy. Maybe not until the Nazi sets foot on shore, but darn soon after that, and don't kid yourself."

"About the beggar in Honolulu, yes," Freddy Farmer said. Then with a shake of his head, "But about that Nazi spy, no. He wouldn't be bothered with that, because if he's as smart as

you say he'll know that his Nazi spy will never be able to set foot on shore. I mean, if he has such communication with his Honolulu chap then he'll obviously be informed that his mail sack business failed. That we did arrive. So he'll naturally realize that his Nazi spy will be identified by us before he even steps ashore."

"Nuts!" Dawson snapped. "If you give the guy a little brains, then for cat's sake go all the way, and figure him for a lot of brains. Figure him to be able to figure it the way we have. Vice-Admiral Stone's plan, I mean. In short, that we won't grab the guy aboard ship. That we'll let him go ashore, and trail him. Don't you see, Freddy? If that Jap figures that we heard all about his Nazi spy sailing on one of the carriers, then he *also* figures that we *also* heard about the meeting in Honolulu. And he will act accordingly, believe you me!"

"Well, it's rather involved, but perhaps you're right," young Farmer said with a shake of his head. "But if we spot the chap tomorrow, I wouldn't call that failing."

"I would!" Dawson said quickly. "Nailing that Nazi spy is just part of the thing. There's the Honolulu angle. Now that we're in it, we're in it all the way, as far as I'm concerned. Our

big mistake was to be caught flat-footed way back at the start. So unless the whole thing is cleaned up one hundred per cent, it'll be a failure for me, is the way I look at it."

"Yes, I see your point," Freddy Farmer mumbled. "But not to change the subject, what do you think of Vice-Admiral Stone's plan for us to spot the chap?"

"Okay, I guess," Dawson replied with a shrug. "The entire force is to anchor inside the submarine nets while the vice-admiral makes his inspection of all three carriers. We'll go aboard with his party not as officers, but as gobs. Nobody ever looks at a couple of gobs in a vice-admiral's inspection party. Besides, we won't be trailing along with all the gold braid. We'll be stationed at the gangway ladder where we can get a look at everybody, and still be noticed. All pilots will be lined up on deck, and so forth. Yeah, I think the plan is okay."

"Wish I thought so," Freddy Farmer grunted. "Strikes me as a bit too fancy, though. I can think of a lot of ways that would be just as good, and much simpler."

"Well, I'll tell the vice-admiral when he comes in," Dave said with a chuckle.

And with that they both lapsed into silence

and strolled slowly along the road that paralleled the Kahuku Point beach. There was nothing to be gained by rehashing things. What was to happen tomorrow when the carrier force arrived, would happen. And that would be that. So they strolled along, one or both of them pausing every now and then to admire the moonlight on the palm trees, or the way it danced over the broad expanse of the Pacific like billions and billions of spinning silver coins. At one spot the sight was particularly awe-inspiring, and Dawson stared at it intently like a man in a trance.

Eventually, he heaved a long sigh, stretched his arms over his head, drew in a deep breath, and then let it out in another long drawn out sigh of complete contentment.

"Some night, hey, Freddy?" he grunted. "Boy, this is sure one swell spot, war or no war. Me for this place in my old age, and no fooling. After I make my million in civilian life, of course. How about you, little man?"

There was no comment from Freddy Farmer. Dawson turned and started to open his mouth to repeat his words, but he snapped it shut instead. For perhaps five full seconds he stared pop-eyed at the spot where the English-born air ace had

been walking by his side. But Freddy wasn't there any more. He had disappeared; completely vanished as though the ground had swallowed him up. Shadowed moonlight all over the road, but not a sign of Freddy Farmer.

"Hey, Freddy!" Dawson suddenly let out a yell. "Where the heck are you, fellow?"

The silence of the night swallowed up the echo of his words. He slowly turned all the way around and searched with puzzled eyes in all directions. A wave of annoyance suddenly flooded through him. He had the urge to go on walking along the road, but on second thought he curbed it.

"Okay, funny man!" he snapped. "Come out, come out, wherever you are. Come on, Freddy! I don't feel like playing *that* kind of a game! Snap into it, fellow!"

And the silence again swallowed up the echo of his words. There was nothing but the moonlight, the shadows, and the soft velvety silence of a Pacific night. Real anger flamed up in Dawson, and then suddenly the anger was touched by the finger of cold fear. A clammy, eerie sensation rippled across the back of his neck. For no reason at all he suddenly remembered when once as a kid he had fallen out of

bed and awakened on the floor of his room. The room was black as pitch, and the feel of the carpeted floor as frightening to him as the feel of a rattlesnake. His yells that night had been heard five houses down the block. But he didn't make a sound now. The very air that he breathed seemed to clog in his throat.

And then without warning the strangled cry came to him from out of the depths of the night-shrouded trees that bordered the road on the left.

"Dave! Help! Come quick! Dave! Dave!"

The last was choked off by what seemed like a gurgling moan that made Dawson's heart stand still, and the blood in his veins turn to ice. For perhaps two seconds he stood paralyzed, and then he spun and plunged into the dark trees. But he had taken only half a dozen steps when something caught him sharply across the forehead. Something else slammed into his right side. And as his head seemed to spin off his shoulders, and the rest of his body to go crashing downward, he was vaguely conscious of hissing sounds, and the dank, musty smell of something crawling and loathsome!

CHAPTER NINE

Room Of Death

WHEN HE again opened his eyes, a smell that was something like that of dead and rotting flower blossoms filled Dave Dawson's nose, and seemed to clog up his throat. For several seconds he stared bewildered at a world of murky shadows. Then suddenly he realized that he was in some kind of a room, and that he was lying on his side on the floor of that room. And the air he was breathing was heavy with the smell of rotting sweet things. Like perfume that had turned bad. Or still more like cheap perfume mixed with a dash or two of ether. It stung his nose, and his eyes, and made him gag.

"What the heck?" he heard his own voice mumble.

The sound of his own mumbling voice gave him the idea to sit up and take immediate stock of his crazy, cockeyed surroundings. But the

idea remained just an idea. That is to say, he soon found that he could not sit up. And he couldn't because his wrists were bound tightly behind his back. His ankles were bound tightly, too. And a rope connecting his bound wrists and ankles was drawn so taut that the only movement he could make was to roll over on his face. And that didn't do any good because then he couldn't see anything. And the strain on his wrists and ankles made white dots of pain dance about in front of his eyes.

Gasping and panting for breath, he managed to flop back onto his other side. But for a couple of minutes he could see nothing but blurs because of the dancing white spots. Then as his vision cleared he saw the huddled form of Freddy Farmer on the floor not four feet from him. Freddy was trussed up, too, and his eyes were closed tight as though in deep sleep. A terrible fear gripped Dawson as he stared at his flying pal, and then his heart began to beat again when he saw that Freddy was breathing regularly.

Over beyond Freddy on the opposite wall was a small window. But it was so high up from the floor that it was more like a skylight. And when Dawson twisted his head back so that he

could look up at it, he saw four pale squares of light. The pale light from outside seeped down through the four small panes of glass that made up the window.

"Dawn," he muttered. "It must be close to dawn, or else that glass is plenty dirty. I'll . . . *Dawn?* But it was early evening when it happened. Well, not later than nine o'clock, anyway. Yeah! Freddy disappeared, and then yelled. I went hunting for him, and . . . bingo! I got clouted, and there was a funny smell. Something like this, and . . ."

He cut off the rest with a groan and closed his stinging eyes tight as he tried to force his brain back in memory and recall what else had followed. But he couldn't remember anything else. Yes, a sort of hissing sound, that dank, musty smell, and then . . . and then the lights had gone out for him.

He groaned again, opened his eyes and looked at Freddy Farmer. He tried for a moment or two to wiggle and edge closer, but the white pain in his wrists and ankles made him give it up.

"Freddy, Freddy!" he called out softly. "Can you hear me, Freddy? Open your eyes, pal. This is Dave. Can you hear me, Freddy?"

Young Farmer's eyelids seemed to flutter a

bit, but they did not open immediately. A tremor ran down the youth's body. Dave saw him quiver, and then heard him sigh. Then presently young Farmer opened his eyes, and just gaped blankly.

"Freddy, it's Dave!" Dawson said sharply. "How are you, Freddy? Okay, pal? Say something, won't you?"

The English-born air ace continued to stare blank-eyed for a moment or two longer. Then he blinked rapidly, and frowned.

"What's the matter, Dave?" he asked. "Where are we? What are we . . . ? Ouch! I say, what the heck is up? I can't move. My feet and hands are tied! I say!"

"Me, too, Freddy," Dawson said quickly, and tried to grin but without much success. "But I don't know any of the answers. I just woke up. Look, what happened to you last night?"

"To me, last night?" young Farmer murmured. Then in a startled voice. "*Last night*, you said? You mean . . . ? I mean, this isn't last night? I mean, this isn't tonight. I . . . Oh, good grief, what do I mean?"

"Take it easy, son, take it easy," Dave soothed him. "Right now it's early dawn, I think. Last night you suddenly faded out of the picture.

We'd parked the jeep at Kahuku Point beach and were taking a stroll. Remember? You disappeared, called out to me, and I ran smack into a kick in the face, or something. Why did you call out? Where had you gone, and why?"

Freddy Farmer scowled, and slowly moved his head from side to side in a bewildered gesture. Then suddenly he stiffened, and his eyes flew open wide.

"Good gosh, yes, Dave!" he gasped. "It was the queerest thing. Happened so suddenly that I don't even know now exactly what did happen. Something got me from behind, quick as a wink. Around the throat and over the nose and mouth. I swear I smelled ether, but I'm not sure. Everything sort of went spinning like, and black as pitch. Later I seemed to come to. I was being carried by a couple of chaps. Maybe there were more than just a couple. Anyway, I guess it was instinct, I knew that something was wrong. I remember now yelling to you. And then everything went black and smelly again. But where are we, and how in the world did we get here?"

"And I still don't know the answers, Freddy," Dawson said to him. "As I said, I came running when I heard you yell, and the next thing I knew I was falling down a great big black hole

full of hissing sound, and a funny smell. Like the smell that's in the air now. Boy! if I could only get a lungful of fresh clean air then maybe I could think straight for a second or so. The old brain is whirling so fast it's going to burn out a bearing sure as shooting. But are you hurt, or wounded, or anything, Freddy?"

"Nope," the other replied. "Nothing wrong with me except that I'm trussed up like a blooming pig ready for roasting. I wonder what it all means? Have you heard any sounds, or anything like that?"

Before Dawson could so much as open his mouth to say, "No," they both heard the drone of aircraft engines up in the air outside. They listened to the sound grow louder and louder until they could tell that the aircraft was directly over them. Then it grew fainter and fainter and presently died away altogether. Neither of them spoke. It was like a mockery of fate to be a couple of air pilots trussed up helpless on the dirty floor of some strange and smelly room listening to an airplane thunder by outside.

"Well, that was a Yank plane, anyway," Dawson eventually grunted, as though that fact would help them a little. "I could tell."

"So could I," Freddy Farmer said in a wist-

ful tone. Then, "I'm afraid we've been a couple of blasted fools again, Dave. Blind, thoughtless, stupid fools. And after the warning Vice-Admiral Stone gave us."

"You mean that doom caught up with a couple of doomed guys?" Dawson asked. "But that's nuts, Freddy!"

"Nuts?" young Farmer came back sharply. "Why, you were the one who had the hunch that our Japrat friend probably could communicate with his pals in the Islands. So it was . . ."

"I know what I said," Dave growled. "But if it was that, we wouldn't be here. Alive, I mean. We'd be dead. Why kidnap us in the dark of night, and at a lonely spot like the one where we were? Why not just give us both the works, and be done with it? With us dead they haven't a single thing to fear about that Nazi spy being identified. Or . . . oh my gosh!"

"What, Dave?" Freddy Farmer asked quickly when Dawson let out the sudden exclamation and then lapsed into a sort of breathless silence.

"Nothing, nothing, Freddy," Dave replied. "Let's skip it. I wonder where the heck we are, anyway. Sure is a mixed-up business, isn't it? I wonder . . ."

"Here, none of that, Dave!" young Farmer

snapped. "I can see through you like glass, old thing. You suddenly thought of something that gave you a fair jolt. You want to spare me by not telling me. I want none of that sort of thing, and you know it, Dave. So come on. Out with it, old chap. What was the sudden thought?"

"Oh, look, Freddy, let's just skip it and . . ."

"Dave!" Freddy cut him off again. "That's not being quite fair to your pal, don't you think, what?"

Dawson didn't reply for a long moment. He struggled with himself, and then sighed softly.

"Okay, Freddy," he said slowly. "But of course it's a crazy, screwy thought. Doesn't make any sense at all. Really, to tell the truth, it . . ."

"Just tell it to me, Dave," young Farmer said quietly, and fixed his eyes on Dawson's face.

"That maybe this is *it*, Freddy," Dawson finally said, and gave a jerk of his head to include the room in which they were bound prisoners. "Maybe they didn't want to leave any signs, such as a couple of bodies, and so forth. Maybe they decided that it was best for you and me just to disappear, and . . . and here we are. But I tell you, pal, it's really a screwy thought. Absolutely absurd. You shouldn't have forced me, kid."

Freddy Farmer didn't say anything when Dawson finished speaking. He closed his eyes for a moment, licked his lips, and then opened his eyes and appeared to stare thoughtfully into space. Dawson started to speak again, but Freddy smiled a little and shook his head.

"That's all right, Dave," he said quietly. "Perhaps you are right, and then again, perhaps you are wrong. And I do think you're wrong. As I look at it they simply wouldn't take the chance.

"Take what chance?" Dawson demanded.

"That we'd escape from this place, wherever it is," the English-born air ace replied. "They'd kill us and leave us here, never to be found perhaps. They wouldn't let us go out the slow way, knowing that we might possibly escape by some miracle. They'd make sure, don't you see?"

"Yeah, I get your point, Freddy," Dave said with a nod. Then, grinning broadly, he added, "Well, didn't I just get through saying that it was probably a cockeyed thought?"

"But I wonder *why* they want to keep us alive?" Freddy Farmer murmured as though he were too busy with his own thoughts to hear Dawson's question.

In the next moment, though, all conversation between them ceased abruptly. A door opened

and two shadowy figures came into the room. At the sound of the latch and the soft footsteps that followed immediately, Dawson screwed his head around, fully expecting to see the leer-ing, buck-toothed face of some son of Nippon. Neither of the two figures who came into the room were Japanese. At any rate they certainly didn't look like Japanese. They looked more like a couple of ragged Hawaiians, although their cheek bones were unusually high. And when Dawson took a second look at their faces he was instantly struck with the impression that both were a trifle scared. One of them carried a tray of food, while the other carried a snub-nosed automatic, and acted as though he expected the thing to blow up almost any second. The one with the tray of food placed it on the floor, and then, while the other stood guard with his "nervous" gun, he moved around by Dawson's head, and motioned for the Yank air ace to roll over on his stomach. Dawson hesitated an instant and then did as signalled. Hands fumbled with the rope about his wrists, and presently his half numbed wrists were free. He pulled them down by his sides, and with his head turned that way he watched the man free Freddy Farmer's wrists, also. That done, the brown-

skinned man leaped quickly backward and pushed the tray of food between them with one bare foot.

"Food," he said in a strange husky voice. "You eat. You eat food."

Not all of the circulation had returned to Dawson's wrists and his arms from finger tips to shoulder sockets felt stabbed by a billion needles as he shifted over on his back, and pushed himself up to a sitting position. He heard Freddy Farmer gasp as he, too, sat up. He shot a quick glance at his English-born pal, saw that he was suffering the same kind of pain, and then looked at the food. It was of the Hawaiian variety and didn't look bad at all. His prime interest at the moment, however, was not in food, regardless of the growling that had started up in his stomach. He looked at the two raggedly clad brown men, of very uncertain origin no doubt. They returned his look with all the intelligence of a bottle fly showing in their high cheek-boned faces.

"Where are we?" Dawson asked, and smiled at them.

Like a rehearsed act the two brown men shook their heads, and pointed long forefingers at the tray of food.

"You eat," they said in the same breath.

Dawson shook his head, smiled again, and made a gesture with his tingling right arm that included the house where they were.

"What place is this?" he said slowly, spacing his words. "Where is boss man? Me make talk with boss fella, yes. You savvy?"

The two brown men, with jet black hair, shook their heads as one again and pointed.

"Okay, skip it!" Dawson said quickly. "I get the idea. Me eat. Okay, me eat."

He turned to the tray of food, picked up something that looked like a messy salad and stuffed it into his mouth. It tasted surprisingly good. In fact, it tasted exactly like a highly spiced salad.

"Not bad," he grunted.

"Definitely good," Freddy Farmer said with his mouth full. "Which of course adds to the crazy mystery. Why do the blighters feed us, I'd like to know?"

"And I'd like to know who they *are*!" Dawson said with emphasis. Then, reaching out his hand, he said, "Wonder what this stuff is in this cup? Looks like pineapple juice. I . . . well, what do you know, it *is* pineapple juice! But good, too!"

"Why wouldn't it be pineapple juice?" Freddy Farmer murmured as he drank from the other cup. "We're in the Hawaiian Islands, aren't we? And I suppose this other stuff is what they call poi, what?"

"Search me," Dawson said with a shrug, "It's not bad, but I'd rather have a nice juicy steak with French fries, and . . ."

"Dave, stop!" Freddy Farmer groaned, and made an anguished grimace. "That's definitely torture to me, and you know it. Besides, you're not thinking of that sort of thing at all. I wish we could get these two beggars to talk. I fancy they look a bit frightened to me."

"Check," Dave said, and looked at the two brown men, who stood there like a couple of wooden Indians. "And mostly too frightened to talk. I think . . ."

Dawson didn't continue to say what he thought. The air outside wherever they were suddenly became filled with the roar of many planes. He judged that there were a good fifty or more planes up there in the sky. He impulsively threw back his head and stared up at the high window. The light seeping down through was considerably less pale than it had been before, but the glass was still too dirty and cov-

ered with cobwebs for him to see the sky above.

"Yank planes," he said, lowering his gaze to the two brown men. "I wonder if it's the welcome escort for the carrier force. I . . . Oh-oh! Take a look, Freddy! Our brown friends are scared of planes, too."

And it was seemingly true. The two brown men were virtually cringing back, and their jet black eyes were flitting from their prisoners to the high window, and back again. Their actions suddenly filled Dawson's brain with a mad idea.

"Bombs!" he suddenly shouted at the top of his voice. "Get out of here, *everybody!*"

The two brown men jumped as though they had been shot, and their faces turned a milky chocolate with fear. They both shivered violently, and then one, the taller of the two, gasped something in a tongue Dawson had never heard. Both of them spun around and leaped frantically toward the door. They jerked open the door and went through it like a couple of brown streaks of lightning.

Wild hope leaped up in Dawson, but it lived for no more than three or four seconds. From beyond the open door came snarls like those of a trapped and wounded tiger. Almost instantly the snarls were followed by the unmistakable

thuds of something crashing against human flesh. Back into the room came the two brown men, like a couple of acrobats doing back flips. They both hit the floor and went slithering across it to bang up against the opposite wall. In a crazy, abstract sort of way Dawson noticed that the one holding the gun still clung to it.

Then Dawson took his eyes off the two and looked toward the door opening. The door had been flung wide, and standing framed in it was a giant figure. A death giant, no less, for he was unmistakably Japanese. He was positively huge, but he was Jap from the top of his close-shaven head all the way down to his splayed-toed feet. A savage leer twisted his thick lips back over his buck teeth. And in the slits that were his eyes was a fiendish gleam that made Dawson swallow in spite of himself, and his icy heart start downward like an express elevator.

For a long moment the two air aces locked eyes with the giant figure. And then the Jap's shoulders shook with silent mirth.

"Yes, it is very amusing to scare chickens, and watch them flee," he said in halting English, and threw a look of scorn at the two brown men cringing on the floor over by the far wall. "But we Japanese are not chickens. We are masters. All others are the chickens. We . . . do this!"

The Jap suddenly spit out the last, and with his big yellowish brown hands he went through the motions of slapping a chicken down on the block and chopping off its head. Freddy Farmer gasped in spite of himself. The Jap heard him, burned him with his eyes, and once again his huge shoulders shook with silent mirth.

"You do not like to lose your head and neck, Captain Farmer?" he said, and almost pleasantly, too. "Then you were a fool to come to Oahu. But you are a fool in many things. Both of you are fools! You will both agree, as you *die!*"

CHAPTER TEN

Unlucky Day

FIFTEEN long seconds passed before the huge Jap spoke again. He stood there motionless in the doorway, leering at them as though waiting for them to speak. But Dawson and Freddy Farmer returned his stare as best their twanging nerves would permit, and remained silent. The Jap grew tired of the silence, and grew annoyed. He came a step or two into the room and stood straddle-legged, with bunched fists on hips, and arms akimbo.

"Well?" he suddenly thundered. "You would like to make me think that you are not afraid? That you are not chickens, too?"

For a moment Dawson continued to regard him silently, but on impulse he changed his mind.

"That's right," he said. "We're not afraid to

die. We don't want to die, but we're not afraid to. The job is done. That's all that mattered. We knew the chances we took, and . . ."

Dawson paused almost dramatically, and then shrugged a little.

"And our luck has simply run out," he went on a moment later. "But the job is done. That is, the part we had to do. Just stick your nose outside this place, if you don't think so! Honolulu isn't such a terribly big place, you know. And . . . well, thanks for the meal here. Mind if I finish it before you have your fun?"

It took every ounce of will-power and self-control that Dave Dawson ever possessed to fling a questioning look at the Jap, and then calmly turn and start eating. His insides were on fire with fear. He could feel cold drops of sweat running down his back, and oozing from his armpits. He wanted to shout wild things at the top of his voice. He wanted to try and lunge up on his bound feet, and throw himself barehanded at this killer giant, and get it over with as quickly as possible. But there was that in him which forced him to play his part. Win, lose, or draw, he had to play his part, because common sense told him that was all that he could do, and maintain a fighting chance for his

life. And a fighting chance for Freddy Farmer's life, too.

"There's lots left, Freddy," he said calmly, and grinned stiffly at his pal. "Go on, dig in, boy. Eat while you can."

Young Farmer's frozen face relaxed, and even lighted up. The English-born air ace returned his grin, and nodded.

"Oh yes, quite, Dave," he said. "Might as well eat. The job's done, anyway. Wonder what time it is? They must all be in position now."

Both air aces sensed rather than saw the swift, tigerish movement of the big Jap leaping forward. A brown foot caught their tray of food and sent it skimming across the floor to crash up against the wall in back of them and shower uneaten food all over the place. Then the Jap backed up, virtually foaming at the mouth, and glared at them out of eyes that held all the devilish hate in the world.

"Fools, swine, pigs, dogs of dogs!" he screamed furiously. "I will teach you to sing a different tune. I will teach you many things before you die!"

The Jap nodded his head violently, spat at them, and spun around to hurl a strange tongue at the two brown men still criaging on the floor

over by the wall. Dawson tried to catch just one of the words that the big Jap flung off his lips, but he failed utterly. The Jap spoke a language, or at least a dialect, that he had never in his life heard before.

The two brown men heard it, and understood it, however. Their prominent-boned faces still alive with fear, they got quickly to their feet, and went over to Dawson and Freddy Farmer, flung them flat on their faces and bound their wrists behind their backs once more. This time, though, they did not attach the end of the ropes to those about the ankles. And Dawson held his breath in fear that they would realize it and promptly do so. But they didn't. They straightened up, and then at a snarling sound from the big Jap ducked quickly out of the room like a couple of terrified brown rabbits.

The big Jap himself started to leave; then he hesitated on the threshold and turned his huge close-shaven head to glare back at them.

"Consider well what I have spoken, dog of dogs!" he boomed. "And prepare to die ten thousand times ten thousand times."

And with that he went out the doorway and yanked the door shut with a crash that made the whole room vibrate like a violin string.

"Cute little guy, isn't it!" Dawson presently broke the quivering silence. "Too bad his folks didn't drown him at birth!"

"Too bad for us, too," Freddy Farmer said soberly. "Frankly, I don't like the looks of things, Dave. I mean . . . well, it's all so blastedly mixed up, if you get what I mean?"

"Yeah," Dawson grunted. "But we're still alive, so that's something."

"That's just the point!" Freddy said quickly. "We *are* still alive. But why? That beggar was mad enough to eat us alive. I was certain he was going at least to kick us in the stomach, just as Japrats love to do so much. But the rotter didn't do a thing, except curse at us!"

"I know, and it doesn't seem to make sense," Dawson said slowly, and frowned. "But maybe it does at that. Maybe his nibs isn't the big shot around here. Maybe the way we shot off our mouths threw him out of gear. Maybe he didn't dare go to town on us without the big boy's okay."

"Let's say that that's right," young Farmer grunted. "Then what does this big boy want with us? In short, Dave, what earthly use are we to anybody, trussed up here as we are?"

"If that's the sixty-four dollar question, then

"I lose all I've built up," Dave groaned. "I don't know, Freddy. I don't know from nothing about this crazy mess. The only thing we can do is wait and see what happens."

"Yes, I'm afraid so," Freddy said with a heavy sigh. Then with an angry groan, "The dirty blighter, kicking all that nice food away!"

That Freddy Farmer could even think of his stomach at such a time made Dawson chuckle in spite of the torturing thoughts that stabbed their way through his confused brain. Then they both lapsed into silence, and continually shifted this way and that in a desperate effort to relieve the numbing pains that crawled up their arms and legs. Neither of them succeeded, and presently they both lay motionless, silently enduring their pains, and staring blank-eyed at each other as the gloom of death seeped in to flood their throbbing brains.

After a while fatigue rubbed out the numbing pains with sleep, and the next thing either of them realized the big Jap was back in the room and kicking them into wakefulness.

"Wake up, dogs of dogs!" he bellowed. "Wake up, fools!"

Hot angry words rose to Dawson's lips as he instinctively tried to turn his body away from

the kicking foot, but the words went unspoken when he saw that the big Jap was not alone. Another Jap, about half the other's size, was also present. He was impeccably dressed in American clothes. From the top of his finely woven panama to the soles of his brown and white sport shoes he looked as though he had just stepped off Fifth Avenue, New York. Perhaps the most startling thing of all about the man was that he was rather good-looking. His face bore the tell-tale contours of a Jap, yes, but his teeth were not so much on the elephant tusk side. And they were the whitest teeth that Dawson had ever seen. Added to that, the Jap wore a warm friendly smile, with just a hint of amusement.

"Enough, Kato," he said in a pleasant voice, yet which contained a ring of steel. "Our little American guests are fully awake now. There is no necessity to be cruel always, Kato. Release their hands and feet."

The big Jap stopped kicking and turned around to gape wide-eyed at the small Jap, and shake his head. The well dressed one smiled into his big flat face, but pin-points of blue light seemed to appear in his eyes.

"Free them, Kato," he said softly. "I have so

spoken. If then you are afraid, stand in back of them and keep your eyes on their movements. You have searched them, Kato?"

"Yes, Honored One," Kato replied, as though he were addressing the two-for-a-nickel Emperor himself. "They carry no papers but their own. Nothing else. Their papers I have already given to you."

"Then release them, Kato," the little Jap repeated, and with lazy, nonchalant movements he drew a cigarette and a long silver-banded ivory holder from his pocket. He placed the cigarette in the holder, drew a gold lighter from his pocket and snapped it into flame. Every one of his movements was smooth and effortless, as though he were completely relaxed and enjoying himself at some cocktail party, or in some expensive and exclusive club.

The big Jap looked at him again, and then without another word freed Dawson and Freddy Farmer of their ropes. He was none too gentle about it, but both air aces were too taken up with the immaculately dressed man to feel the pain much. When they were free they got slowly to their feet, stamped the circulation back into them, and then stood there eyeing the small Jap. Kato glided around behind them out of sight,

but both could smell his foul breath against the backs of their necks.

The so called Honored One smoked his cigarette and studied them in polite silence for a moment, and then effortlessly took his one quarter smoked cigarette from the holder and tossed it onto the floor away from him.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Captains Dawson and Farmer," he said. Then with a flashing smile, he added, "But I fear that neither of you share the same pleasure?"

There was only one reply to that question and neither Dawson nor Freddy Farmer bothered. They simply stood there and waited for him to continue.

"My pardon," he said, and made a little snapping motion with the fingers of his right hand. "I have neglected to introduce myself. I am Mr. Yammanato. Of course you have never heard of me, so I will not boast by saying that you probably have. In both your countries, though, they will hear much of Yammanato, before many seasons have passed."

The little Jap paused, but Dawson and Freddy Farmer continued to give him the studied, silent treatment. It did not seem to matter to him much. He raised one eyebrow in polite

question, and then gave a little shrug of his narrow shoulders.

"I am sorry," he said, with just the faintest semblance of a bow. "Of course your only interest in me is why I am here. I will tell you. It is interest in your remarks to that one, Kato, who stands behind you . . . and is most eager to take your lives. You told him your job was completed. I am amused, but a little puzzled, too. We three know that your—er—job, was to identify a certain Navy ensign. But you did *not* identify him. We did not permit you to do that. So there must have been some other job you spoke of to Kato? I should like to have you tell me what it was."

"You probably would, Yammanato," Dawson said evenly. Then with a tight smile, and a shake of his head, "But we're not telling you, and you know it!"

The little Jap did not get angry. Not even the light in his eyes changed. He simply smiled and made a waving motion of one hand as though to indicate that the little joke was on him this time.

"I do not expect you to tell me, voluntarily," he said. "I simply asked, just in case, let us say. To be perfectly frank, I really am not so terribly

interested in this mysterious job. Rather, merely curious. Neither of you has been out of our sight since the moment you landed your Flying Fortress on Hickam Field. Several times we could have killed you, and with little effort. But we did not consider such measures necessary. It was obvious that you had not overheard as much as was at first feared. However, it would be foolish to let you be free when the carrier task force arrived, and so . . ."

Yammanato paused and smiled slowly.

"And so, thoughtless as you Americans are continually, you gave us an excellent chance to kidnap you," he went on. "To kidnap you, and hold you until the carrier force had come and gone, as it has."

The last made Dawson gasp, and sort of bend over as though the little Jap had kicked him in the stomach.

"Gone?" he blurted out. "The carrier force has . . . has *sailed*?"

"But of course!" the Jap replied, and looked at him in surprise. "Did you . . .? But naturally. I am being stupid. I am forgetting that only this morning you awoke from the drugs. I am sorry that I assumed that you knew and understood. The carrier force has been at sea, now, for two days."

Dawson's throat contracted so that he could hardly breathe. He gaped at the Jap in dumb-founded disbelief.

"Two days!" he heard Freddy Farmer choke out. "What day is today?"

"Friday, the thirteenth of the month," Yamamoto replied. "And Friday, the thirteenth, is supposed to be an unlucky day in your country, is it not?"

"Friday, Friday?" Freddy Farmer mumbled over and over to himself. "Why . . . why, it was Monday night when we were at the Kahuku Point beach. I can't believe it. It's a blasted lie!"

"It is the truth, Captain Farmer," the Jap corrected him smoothly. "I am sorry that I cannot permit you to go outside and confirm it by asking anybody you might meet on the street. You will just have to take my word for it. It *is* Friday, the thirteenth, and the American carrier force has been at sea for two days. Its destination is, of course, a matter of mystery to us. But of course it will not remain a mystery to us for very long. I . . . You are sick, Captain Dawson? Kato! Get that chair for Captain Dawson. He is ill, or perhaps something I have said has upset him."

Dave wasn't even listening. He probably couldn't have, even if he wanted to. All the

bombs and guns in the world were going off in his brain. His insides felt as though they had shriveled up into nothing, and as if every drop of blood in his veins were trickling out through the end of his toes. The carrier force had come and gone? That Nazi rat spy had not been caught, and he was now aboard one of the carriers? He made his contact with the man in Honolulu, who was obviously this Yammanato, and had obtained other information to be taken to Admiral Shimoda at Truk? As well as the water flares? But it couldn't be! It was impossible! Yammanato was lying. Freddy and he couldn't have been out cold from drugs from Monday night until Friday. That was crazy, screwy, and downright impossible.

"It is true, Captain Dawson, I am sorry for your sake, to say," the quiet voice of Yammanato filtered through his spinning and roaring thoughts. "And here is your proof. I didn't think of it until just this moment. Stupid of me. I fear I have just been living amongst you Americans too long. I am becoming forgetful. But here, Captain Dawson. See for yourself."

The little Jap had pulled a folded copy of the *Hawaiian Herald* from his pocket, and was holding it up for them both to see. The big black

headlines were just so many blurs to Dawson. His eyes flew to the date in small type, and all the life seemed to flow out of him.

It was Friday, the thirteenth of the month!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Fate Laughs

"WELL?" the quiet voice of Yammanato came to him, after a period of time which seemed to be no less than a hundred years. "Do you believe me, now? Or do you think I printed this myself for a little joke?"

Dawson didn't say a thing, and neither did Freddy Farmer. It is doubtful if at that moment either of them could have spoken a word, even at the cost of their lives. The blackest and most inexcusable failure possible was theirs. It was complete and utter defeat for them. Every single step they had taken had been a step downhill toward failure and disgrace. They had failed Vice-Admiral Carter, and they had failed Vice-Admiral Stone, and Commander Drake. And they had failed themselves. From the very moment the lightning had struck them as they crouched outside that shack near San Diego they

had not done one single thing that wasn't the wrong thing to do. Twice doom had reached for them, and missed. But not the third time. It was all over now. They had failed. To the end of their days they would not be able to hold their heads up among men. It would be far better if . . .

"Good fortune is a fickle woman, Captain Dawson," Yammanato spoke again, as Dawson caught himself swaying like a drunken man. "She belongs to no one, for always. Even I have suffered from her fickle ways at times. But in your case you were doomed to lose. You were mere boys trying to beat men. To beat men who will one day become masters of the entire world. So do not let your sorrow and anger at yourself rob you of your desire to live. It was inevitable, this thing. You two were but two pawns to be taken and removed from the game. We Japanese have made this thing happen to others before, and we will make it happen to still more in the future."

The pitch-black mood still engulfed Dawson, but he forced himself to rally his thoughts, and to regain control of them. He looked at Yammanato and regarded him, flint-eyed.

"Taking a couple of tricks isn't winning the whole game, Yammanato," he said with an ef-

fort. "Okay, we didn't catch that spy aboard the carrier, and the force has sailed. You forget the other thing. The other job we did accomplish!"

The little Jap just looked at him and smiled pleasantly.

"How many times, Captain Dawson?" he asked with arched eyebrows.

"How many times, what?" Dawson retorted.

"How many times has the famous American tendency to bluff been successful with you?" the Jap shot right back at him. "Another job? Well, somehow I find myself not even curious any more, Captain Dawson. Simply talking with you has satisfied me completely. There was no other job, and we all know that now."

"No?" Dawson flung at him. "That's a horse on you, Yammanato! If nothing was bothering you, Farmer and I wouldn't be alive now. It's not the Japrat way to let their prisoners go on living for nothing. It won't work, Yammanato. And I do mean *your* bluff!"

The little Jap continued to smile, and then suddenly he looked almost sad and a little reproachful.

"I am afraid you have absorbed too much American propaganda," he said softly. "Not all

Japanese are alike in the matter of waging war . . . and winning. There are many like I am. The thrill of the battle is not death for my enemies. It is the defeat and the complete humiliation of the enemy that pleases me most. Why have you not long since been dead? I will gladly tell you, Captains Dawson and Farmer. Because killing you would not bring me half the joy or the satisfaction of letting you live to return to Vice-Admiral Stone, and Commander Drake, as two items of proof that their stupidity is no less than your own. Your deaths would mean nothing to me because I have nothing against you as individuals. You are, as I have said, merely two pawns that I have won, and which it pleases me to return to the loser . . . for what you are worth. No, I have no desire at all to kill you. In a week, or two weeks, or perhaps longer, you will be drugged again and returned to the very spot where we captured you. I will have left the Islands by then. Of course, if when you again awake from the drugs, you wish to take your own lives, that is something that will be out of my hands. But I have a feeling that you will not do that. You Americans appear to have one admirable quality, stupid as it is. You find it difficult to realize when you are defeated."

The Jap stopped talking, smiled broadly, and made a little gesture with his hands, palms upward.

"And now I must leave you," he said. "No, you are not to be tied up again. Kato is a little over-zealous on some things. You are free to move about this room as you wish. Blankets will be given you to sleep on. There is already some furniture here. Make what use of it you like. I am sure you will have no complaint about the food we will give you. No, your confinement will not be too severe a hardship in a physical sense. And one more thing. If you are overcome with the desire to escape from this room, you are quite welcome to try. Kato! Come with me."

Yammanato raised his voice slightly on the last, and then calmly turned his back on the two air aces and walked toward the door. Wild madness seized hold of Dawson and he was tempted to fling himself at the little Jap. But he had just enough cold, hard common sense left not to make the slightest move in that direction. Kato was sidling around them, his jet black eyes glittering and alert. And Dawson knew that the giant son of Nippon had the power in either hand to snuff out his life with a single blow. So he stood stock-still and inwardly prayed that

Freddy Farmer would do the same. And Freddy did.

As he reached the door Yammanato turned and looked back at them inquiringly.

"There is something else," he said. "Or maybe there isn't. Have either of you a reasonable request to make? Say, something that might add to the comfort of your visit? After all, you can expect to be my guests for a considerable length of time."

Dawson started to shake his head, and hot, blistering words rose up in his throat. But at that very instant the glimmer of an insane hope winked in his brain.

"Yes, I've a request, Yammanato," he said, and pointed upward. "The stink in this place would suffocate me in a day. How about opening that skylight and letting some fresh air into the place?"

The small Jap's eyes flew to the window, and Dawson could tell he was gauging its height. Suddenly he lowered his eyes to Dawson's face and smiled and nodded.

"Certainly, Captain Dawson," he said. "I will have Kato open it at once. Even by piling up the furniture I do not think you could reach it. But if you can . . . my very best wishes, Cap-

tain. It is sixty feet from that skylight to the ground, and nothing but sheer wall. Nor does that let out on any roof. It is simply an opening in the side of the building. For ventilation, of course. Kato! Open that skylight."

The big Japanese hesitated while the shadow of a scowl passed across his face, and then he went over to the side wall and unhooked the pair of lines that controlled the skylight. He pulled down on one hard and the hinged window opened with a rusty squeak. Then he yanked viciously on both lines and they parted in a shower of dust high up by the skylight. Rolling up the lines that dropped to the floor, the big Jap stuffed them in his pocket and glared at Dawson and Freddy Farmer. Yammanato laughed softly.

"I'm afraid that Kato has more confidence in your ability to escape, Captains, than I have," he said. "But now if it rains you will probably get wet."

"We won't mind," Dawson said with a stiff grin. "And thanks for the fresh air, Yammanato. It's certainly needed around here."

The polished Jap gave him a brief smile, a longer searching look, and then nodded and went outside with Kato at his heels. The big

brute of a Jap jerked the door shut with a bang, and the two air aces heard both the key twisting in the lock, and a bolt ramming home. Then all was silent again.

But not quite completely silent. There were faint, new sounds that came to their ears as the two youths stood there in their room prison. Sounds that came down through the skylight high above their heads. The faint murmurs and whispers of a city of some one hundred and thirty-five thousand population. The sounds of Honolulu. They both listened to the sounds for a moment, and then looked at each other.

"Too bad we didn't go down in flames in that Fortress!" young Farmer broke the silence between them bitterly. "What a blasted mess we've made of everything. Gosh! I was never so disgusted with anybody as I am with myself right now!"

"Yeah," Dawson mumbled with a grimace. "I'm sure not in love with me, that's a cinch. The carrier force already two days at sea, and that Nazi rat still aboard one of the ships! When he proved that to us it hit me as hard as hearing that we'd lost the war."

Freddy Farmer gloomily agreed with a silent nod, and not words. Dawson bit his lower lip in

meditation, balled one clenched fist into the palm of the other hand, and cast furtive glances at young Farmer out of the corner of an eye.

"Are you game, Freddy?" he presently asked in a low voice.

The English-born air ace jerked his head around and looked at him puzzled.

"Game for what?" he demanded. "What do you mean?"

"Taking our chances on getting out of here," Dawson said. "Everything looks like it's been sunk to the bottom. Heaven knows but what that Nazi rat has tossed half a dozen water flares over the side by now. But . . . well, until I'm dead and gone I'll never give up trying, at least. No matter how much of a fool I've made of myself to date. Besides, there's always the chance that something lucky *for us* might happen."

Freddy Farmer made an angry gesture with his hands as Dawson paused.

"If you've got something to say, Dave, for heaven's sake then say it!" he bit off. "What are you working up to, I'd like to know? What do you mean, take our chances on getting out of here? You know perfectly well I'd risk anything to get out of this hole. But how? It's

impossible! We even haven't a gun between us to shoot the lock and bolt off that door. And even if he was lying about the window being sixty feet from the ground, how are we going to get up there? Fly?"

"Close that trap of yours, and keep your shirt on, and you'll find out!" Dawson said sharply, but placed his arm on Freddy's shoulder. "I've got a key, see? This. Don't even know how it got into my pocket. Felt it in the lining as Yammanato was leaving. That's why I asked for him to raise the window. Look."

As Dawson spoke he pulled a match from his pocket and held it up. Wild hope had blossomed on Freddy Farmer's face, but it faded out in a flash as he stared at the match. He switched agonized eyes to Dawson's face.

"Don't, Dave, please!" he said in a voice that was close to breaking. "This isn't the time for leg pulling, or any of your funny gags. Please, old man! It only makes me feel worse, and . . ."

"Stop it, will you?" Dawson barked. "Sweet tripe! Do you think I'm wasting time kidding, *now!* Don't be a dope. This little match *is* a hope for us . . . I hope. Now, give me a hand lifting the table and stuff, that's here, over by the door. First thing is to block them off from getting in.

No, save the questions. Just give me a hand, Freddy. And I'm not crazy, so help me!"

Freddy Farmer closed his mouth with an effort, and together they lifted a heavy table, two chairs, and a bamboo chest affair, across the room and wedged them as best they could against the door.

"Okay," Dawson said when that was done. "Peel off your tunic and shirt and tear them into strips. I'm going to do the same just as soon as I get old rags and papers over there in the corner."

But Freddy Farmer didn't move. He simply stood rooted in his tracks and stared at Dawson as though he believed his pal had suddenly gone stark, raving mad. He was still standing there rooted in his tracks when Dawson returned with an armful of filthy rags and old papers that he had gathered up from the corner of the room. He placed them in a pile close to the side wall and directly under the skylight. Then he straightened up and took off his own tunic and shirt, and started ripping them down the seams.

"Get yours off, Freddy!" he said. "Get them off fast. Don't you get the idea of the match, now?"

"No, I do not!" young Farmer replied, and fumbled with his buttons. "Unless you intend to set the house on fire?"

"No, just this pile of rags, cloth, and old papers," Dawson said, and motioned for Freddy to toss him his tunic. "And unless I miss my guess it will make plenty of smoke."

"Smoke?" Freddy fairly gagged. "Good grief, why?"

Dawson looked at him, and smiled.

"Boy, you sure are slow on the uptake today, pal," he said and pointed a finger upward. "That skylight. It's a natural for a chimney. If we can make enough smoke it will go pouring out of there. Maybe we'll even have to break up some of those chairs and toss the pieces on the fire. But we want lots of smoke to go pouring out of that skylight for people to see."

"Why, bless me!" Freddy Farmer ejaculated. "It'll . . ."

"Absolutely, my friend," Dawson said grimly. "Somebody's going to see the smoke, think the place is on fire, and pull in the alarm. And if we can keep enough smoke pouring out it's going to be plenty embarrassing for Mr. Yammanato when the fire department, and the police, start banging on his front door. In fact I hope it gives

him, and every one of the rats in this place, a permanent case of heart failure. Anyway, it'll be an out for us, at least."

"Boy, the things you can think up!" Freddy Farmer cried softly as he practically tore his shirt from his back. "I always said you had the brains of a dozen people."

"Well, you've said it once, just now, anyway," Dawson grinned, and tossed Farmer's ripped tunic on the pile. "But let's say a silent prayer that that skylight doesn't act as a down-draft. Okay, Freddy, toss the rest of it on. I'm going to set her alight."

"Just a minute!" young Farmer stopped him. And then after he had closed his eyes tight for a moment, and had opened them, and nodded, he said soberly. "Right-o, Dave. Strike the match, and start the stuff burning."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Flashing Finish

YELLOW throat-stinging smoke curled and swirled about the room where Dawson and Freddy Farmer were held prisoners by Yammanato. It stung their eyes, too, and half blinded them. It hung like a thick blanket of acid not more than three feet from the floor. For some ten minutes now, the two air aces had hugged the floor to keep under the smelly stuff and waited for an updraft to take the smoke upward and out through the skylight.

"I guess you went wrong on this one, Dave," Freddy gasped. "This stuff is heavier than water, and it will never rise."

"It's got to, it's got to, Freddy!" Dawson said grimly. "It's our only hope of getting out of this place. And of maybe getting the rats here in this nest caught."

"Small chance of that, I fancy," Freddy said

with a groan. "But even if the police and the fire department do come busting in here and free us, then what? The way we've messed up this job, it will certainly take something to face Vice-Admiral Stone and Commander Drake. They certainly won't love us for this business, I can tell you!"

"Maybe not, but we'll just have to take our medicine, Freddy," Dawson replied. "But the big idea right now is to get *out* of here. You know there's always a chance that we may be able to do something. After all, the carrier force is only two days at sea. It's going to take longer than two days for them to get within flight range of Truk. At least, near enough for that Nazi rat to skip off and get going. I . . . doggone, I could cut my throat for the way things have turned out. After all the tight places we've been in, and wiggled out of them, to be caught cold like this. Boy, do I feel lower than a heel!"

Freddy Farmer didn't reply for a moment. He moved a bit closer to Dawson on the floor, and then reached out a hand and touched his flying pal on the arm.

"We'll get out, Dave," he said quietly. "We've got to, old chap. And you and I aren't licked until we're dead and buried six feet under, as you would say."

Dawson looked at him, and some of the telling strain went out of his smoke-streaked face. He grinned and winked knowingly at Freddy.

"Now you're talking, kid," he said. "For a moment there I was afraid that you had given up the ship for keeps. But you were just fooling me, and I should have known better. Sure we'll get out, and we'll still win somehow. You just wait and see."

As Dawson finished the last he got slowly up on his hands and knees, and crawled over toward the wall on his right. He was playing a hunch, and his hunch proved to be correct. There was a draft of air over on that side that was lifting the yellow smoke upward. As a matter of fact the smoke was beginning to pour out through the skylight.

"Give the gentleman a cigar; it's working, Freddy!" he cried out in a low voice. "Crawl over here and see for yourself. It's working, Freddy."

A few seconds later young Farmer was by his side and peering upward out of smoke-red-denied eyes. He gasped happily, and instantly crossed all the fingers of his two hands.

"For luck, Dave!" he breathed. "This and a prayer that they will see it outside. I mean, that there aren't tall buildings around here that will

hide it off from those in the street. Gosh! Dave! Look at that stuff pour out. I never knew that just a bundle of clothes and things could throw off so much smoke!"

"One of the very special Dawson fires, kid!" Dave said to him. "And if that amount of smoke going out that skylight doesn't attract plenty of attention, then I'm a Chinese uncle."

"Whatever that means," Freddy Farmer said with a chuckle. "Anyway, all we can do now is wait. As though we haven't been doing that little thing for years and years it seems. I . . ."

Freddy cut off the rest as Dawson suddenly grabbed his arm and gave a shake of his head to be quiet, and listen. Breath virtually locked in their lungs, the two air aces stood perfectly motionless and strained their ears. A few seconds later they were rewarded by the sound of footsteps racing up a flight of stairs beyond their locked and barred door. And almost at the same time there came wild, high-pitched chatter in a language that neither of them understood.

"This is it, Freddy!" Dawson whispered in young Farmer's ear. "Sounds to me like those are the two rats who brought us our food."

"Sounds like them to me, too," Freddy replied. Then, pulling on Dawson's arm, he added

quickly, "Better stand well out of line with that door, Dave. When the blighters find that they can't get in they may try to shoot their way in."

"Yeah, you've got something there," Dawson said.

But that was all he had the chance to say. The door was being tried now, violently. And it definitely sounded as if whoever was outside were having a fit because the door could not be opened. And then came halting words spoken in English through the door.

"Open, please, yes. There is fire and smoke in there. Open, please, and we will put out fire, yes!"

Dawson and Freddy Farmer simply looked at each other, and winked. Neither of them spoke a word, but each could tell that the other had exactly the same thought. In short, that the next few minutes could well mean success or failure for their hopes. There was not much smoke going up from the burning clothes and papers now. The fire had spent itself, and if help in the form of the Honolulu fire and police departments did not come soon, their mad play for freedom would have been all in vain.

And then suddenly from beyond the door a voice spoke that made the hair crawl on the

backs of their necks, and made each wish with all his heart and soul that he had been armed. It was the voice of Yammanato, and it was not soft and quiet and polished now. It was high-pitched, even a little off key, and ringing with fiendish frenzy.

"Open at once or I will kill you through the door. Your trick has failed, do you hear me? It has failed, and if you do not wish to die a thousand deaths then open this door at once. Do you hear me? Do you hear me?"

Fists, and more than one pair of fists, pounded violently on the door. The door squeaked and groaned a little but it did not budge a fraction of an inch. The furniture that the two air aces had piled up in front of it was made of heavy stuff and held the door fast.

"Open! Open this door at once! I have a gun. I am going to shoot!"

It was the man called Yammanato who screamed the words, and almost before their shrilling was lost to the echo there came the muffled sound of two shots, and bullets tore through the heavy paneling in the door to lodge harmlessly in the bamboo chest.

"You see?" Yammanato screamed, seeming to beat the butt of his gun against the door. "I

have a gun, and I will shoot you. No matter where you stand I will be able to hit you. Kato is coming and he is strong enough to break down this door. I tell you, your trick has failed. Be not fools any longer, or it will go that much harder with you. Do you hear me in there? Do you hear me?"

Freddy acted as though he were going to fling some kind of a taunt through the door, but Dawson cut him off with a curt shake of his head, and then put his lips to young Farmer's ear.

"Don't ask for it, Freddy!" he breathed. "He might be able to place the sound of your voice, and plug us at that. Just keep mum. If we don't get a break pretty soon, then . . ."

Dawson didn't finish the last. Rather he finished it with a soft groan and turned his head so that Freddy would not see the look he knew must be showing in his eyes. The sands of time were running dangerously low now. Was fate mocking their crazy efforts? Was this house where they were prisoners so situated that nobody outside would see that yellow smoke pouring from the skylight? Was this house set alone out on the outskirts of Honolulu? Had their desperate attempt failed after all, and in a few

moments would that giant, Kato, smash down the door with his massive shoulders? Would . . . ?

The last thought was never completed in Dawson's brain. At that moment from beyond the door some place came a cry of alarm, and the sound of feet running furiously up the stairs. Then the speaking voice came closer and Dawson could tell that it was Kato shrilling something rapidly in Japanese.

And then . . . and then a voice roared and Dawson's heart leaped with pure joy. It was a good old American voice and it seemed to boom right through the barred door.

"Hey you, what's going on here!" it thundered. "Your place is on fire. What's in that room?"

"It is nothing, Captain," came Yammanato's voice, very sweet and whining. "It was a cigarette that burned one of my jackets. It is all right, now, Captain. But thank you for coming to our aid."

"Oh, yeah?" said the booming voice. "Well, I'm not a captain, just a sergeant. And don't tell me that a cigarette made that much smoke. What's your name anyway? What's . . . Yeah, up here, Mike! Come on up and bring those two guys with you. This looks screwy to me!"

"Coming, Sergeant!" cried out a second born-in-the-U.S.A. voice. "Hey, these guys look Jap to me!"

"But that is silly!" the whining voice of Yamamoto was heard to protest. "We are all native Hawaiians. My name is Komo. I own the little souvenir shop down the street. Why, I have never been in Japan in my life. You are mistaken, Sergeant. We are loyal Hawaiians. And it is true. I was smoking a cigarette and put it down to go out of the room for a minute. It fell out of the ash tray and onto a jacket that was on the arm of a chair. It is really nothing. No harm at all, save a hole in my jacket. And it was my favorite jacket, too."

And that was as long as Dawson and Freddy Farmer decided to wait. There were two Yank soldiers out there. Probably a couple of members of the military patrol in that part of Honolulu. Anyway, they were undoubtedly armed, and besides, the time to act had arrived at last. Dawson looked at Freddy Farmer, and they both nodded.

"Hold them, Sergeant!" Dave yelled at the top of his voice, and started heaving the furniture that blocked the door to one side. "That rat is lying in his teeth. He's a Jap, and so are the

others. We're a couple of Air Forces officers held prisoner in here. We started the fire to bring help. Hold them, Sergeant; we're coming out."

"Hey, what goes on?" came the booming voice.

But at that moment neither Dave nor Freddy wasted any breath replying. Both were straining every ounce of their strength to push the furniture aside and get at the door. It seemed to take them years to do it, and they heard sounds and yells outside. They still paid no attention. And then finally the last of the furniture was out of the way. Dawson grabbed the door knob, turned and yanked the door open. Two big husky members of the military police stood outside blinking at him in dumbfounded surprise. In one corner of the landing the two little brown men cringed. But Yammanato and Kato had obviously ducked past the two soldiers and were racing down a flight of stairs at top speed. Dawson took it all in at a glance, and yelled at the blinking sergeant.

"Stop them!" he cried. "They're Jap spies. Stop them even if you have to shoot!"

The sergeant still gaped blankly, but the private first class who was with him seemed to collect his wits. He spun around and made a grab for Kato.

"Hey you, hold on there!" he barked.

But the giant Jap had no intention of doing that. As he went down the stairs he shot out a huge fist. It caught the American soldier square on the chin and knocked him head over heels as though he were no more than a toy doll. But Kato did not take into consideration that Dawson was up on his toes, and fighting mad. As the soldier went toppling over the gun in his hand flew from his fingers. Dave dived and caught it before it struck the stair landing. He fell on his side but twisted around on the top of the stairs. A split second later the gun in his hand spat out flame and sound. Kato's head snapped forward as though he had been brained from behind by a baseball bat. His big feet lost their footing on the stairs. He stumbled and then went crashing forward to fall headlong down the last seven or eight steps like a slaughtered ox. Even before he crumpled in a heap halfway through an opened door that led out onto a sun-filled street, blood was pouring from the bullet wound in the back of his head, and he was stone dead.

In dying, however, Kato had saved the life of his master, Yammanato. That is to say, his falling body blocked the entire stairway so that Dawson was unable to shoot at Yammanato, who was a few steps ahead of the giant Jap. However,

Dave did not waste any time cursing his luck. Scrambling to his feet, he went down the stairs in just three leaps, hurtled over the prostrate Kato and bolted out into the sunny street.

He spotted Yammanato not over thirty yards away racing headlong up the sidewalk on his right. To Dawson's surprise he didn't see any gun in the Jap spy's hand. Yammanato had either thrown it away, or had stuck it in his pocket when the two Yank soldiers had come running into the house. But even if the Jap had had a gun in either hand, it wouldn't have made any difference to Dawson. The tables were turned, now, and it was Dawson's time to do the talking.

"Stop, you Japrat!" he shouted, and raced up the sidewalk like a streak of lightning.

If the Jap heard the challenge he paid no attention. He increased his speed if anything, and Dawson suddenly saw that he was making for a narrow alley another fifty or sixty yards ahead.

"Stop, Yammanato!" Dave yelled. "Your last chance. Stop, or you get it!"

But Yammanato did not stop. That he heard Dawson was proved by the fact that he flung a single look back over his shoulder, and then

raced full out for what he hoped would be the safety of the alley up ahead. He never reached that alley, though. He missed it by a good twenty yards. Dawson's single shot seemed to knock Yammanato's feet right out from under him, and spin his body in the air like a human top. The Jap hit the sidewalk on his face, and slowly rolled over onto his right side.

The instant the Jap went down, Dave slowed up and went ahead cautiously, his gun out in front of him on the alert for instant action. He had not forgotten the gun that the Jap had fired through the door of that smoke-filled prison room. And when he saw Yammanato slide his right hand inside his jacket he almost pulled the trigger of his gun again, but not quite. Perhaps he could not shoot a man sprawled on the ground, even though he were a filthy Japanese. Or perhaps it was for one of many other reasons. At any rate, he withheld his fire.

And then Yammanato's hand came out from inside his jacket, and it happened. For a brief instant the Hawaiian sun gleamed on the polished blade of a six-inch knife. Then the blade disappeared as the Jap plunged it with both hands to his heart.

"The stinker!" Dawson heard his own voice

pant as he raced up to the Jap. "Takes his own life rather than face the music. Just an old Jap custom, I guess."

But Yammanato was not yet quite dead. He stared up at Dawson out of half closed eyes that gleamed with fiendish hate. And then suddenly his lips slid back over his teeth in a sort of wolfish grin, and faintly spoken words came out from between them.

"Good fortune is a fickle woman. I have so spoken."

And with that the Jap died. Dawson saw death steal over the Nip's face. The light in his eyes went out, he stopped breathing, and all that remained was the blood that had once given him life seeping out past the knife blade and staining his white silk shirt a deep red.

"If that was supposed to be an exit line, Yammanato," Dawson grunted down at the dead man, "it was very corny. Plenty corny."

And then as he straightened up, Freddy Farmer and the two soldiers came dashing up, and all three of them started talking at once.

"Hold everything, everybody!" Dave cried, and held up his two hands. "The rat's dead as a doornail, and now all of us have got things to do, but fast!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

All Or Nothing

COMMANDER DRAKE, of U.S. Navy Intelligence, took off his cap and ran fingers through his hair, and gave a little shake of his head. He had just completed a minute inspection of the house where Dave Dawson and Freddy Farmer had been held prisoner, and now he stood with the two of them in the very prison room. The sergeant, who it seemed was named Ryan, and a whole squad of troops were standing guard on the building. The two still cringing brown men, who Commander Drake guessed were Koreans, were in the sergeant's custody. And the street out in front was now packed with the curious who had been drawn like flies to the scene. And incidentally, the bodies of Yammanato and Kato had been carted away from the public view.

"It's still like somebody telling me a crazy

dream he had!" Commander Drake gasped, and jammed his cap back on his head. "I can still hardly believe it!"

"Well, it was real enough, sir," Dawson said with a grin. "There are a couple of witnesses right here to back up that statement. But as the old saying goes, truth is lots of times stranger than fiction."

"You're telling me!" Commander Drake said, and made a gesture with one hand that included the entire house. "This nest of the little yellow rats right here under my very eyes all this time. And it took you two to smoke them out. And I don't mean that as a pun. Why, heaven knows how much information they've collected in this very house, and then slipped out of the Islands to be used against us. Why, that radio down in the basement is just about as powerful as the naval radio at Kaneohe."

"I sure wish that Yammanato hadn't gone yellow and taken his life," Dawson said grimly. "That's why I shot him in the hip. To save him for you, I hoped."

"Well, don't let it make you feel too bad," Commander Drake said with a shake of his head. "There's one thing about a Jap, and I suppose we should give him some credit for it.

I mean, when he doesn't want to talk there's nothing in the world that can make him talk. When you shot him he knew that he had failed, and would be in disgrace as long as he lived. So the only thing left for him to do was to take his life. Yammanato, he called himself, eh? Well, I'll bet a small sum of money that I won't find him listed under that name, or even listed as living here, when I look him up. Dawson, and you too, Farmer, do you realize what you've done for me? Why you've accomplished in a day what I haven't been able to do since the time of Pearl Harbor. Why, what there is here in this house may prove to be of inestimable value to the Navy, and to the Army, too. Those files in that room downstairs may have every Jap spy this side of Tokyo listed."

"I hope so, sir," Dawson murmured as he stared up at the smoke-smudged skylight. "But as far as I'm concerned it's a failure. Farmer and I missed the boat. And that is exactly what I mean."

"Quite," Freddy Farmer echoed gloomily. "If we hadn't been so utterly stupid as to let ourselves get captured that night, we might have identified that Nazi who is aboard one of the carriers. He might even have led us here, and

the whole thing would have been cleared up very nicely. As Dawson says, it's a blasted failure for me, too. Good heaven! Just think of what may happen to that carrier force. You say you didn't gain an inkling of his identity, sir? Not one of the fighter pilots aboard the three carriers made any suspicious moves."

Commander Drake didn't reply for a moment or two. He frowned, pursed his lips, and balled one clenched fist into the palm of the other hand. Then he sighed, and shook his head.

"Not one blessed thing," he said sadly. "When you two seemed to have disappeared from the face of the Islands, I took the job in hand and personally checked every fighter pilot aboard. Not to anyone's knowledge aboard, of course. And I had what men I could spare check on fighter pilots' moves ashore for the day they were in port. Of course I didn't have enough men to assign one to each fighter pilot, but I doubt if I would have been any more successful.

"But the force sailed!" Dawson said with a groan. "Why? Couldn't you have got Vice-Admiral Stone to delay sailing? Or couldn't you have taken every fighter pilot off the carriers, and replaced them with others? I mean . . . well, wasn't there *something* that could have been done, sir?"

Commander Drake shook his head, and sighed again.

"No," he said quietly. "The mission that force is on now has been planned for months. To hold it up would upset our entire plan of war in the Pacific. The carrier force simply had to sail on schedule. There wasn't anything else we could do but take the chance that that Nazi spy won't be able to get away with whatever he plans to accomplish."

"But why won't he, sir?" Freddy Farmer protested. "Nobody knows who he is!"

The Naval Intelligence officer gestured with his two hands, palms upward.

"You're right, nobody does, Farmer," he said. "But all the fighter squadron and division commanders were called before Vice-Admiral Stone before the force sailed. They were told the whole story and ordered to keep an eye on their pilots at all times. Because of one rat in their midst all the others have got to suffer for it. But that's the way it is. Also, certain other officers aboard the carriers were told the story, and they will keep a strict watch of the deck beginning with sundown. And another precaution has been taken, also. It's probably the one that will get us the best results, if there are to be any results."

"And what precaution is that, sir?" Dawson asked as the commander paused for breath.

The Naval Intelligence officer permitted a faint smile to light up his grave face for a moment.

"That was my contribution to the affair," he said. "A part of the destroyer escort will sail the same course but exactly four hours behind the carriers. You heard that Jap in San Diego tell the Nazi that the flares will burst into light some three to four hours after they have been in the water. Well, the destroyers will steam four hours behind the carriers, so their look-outs should certainly spot any flares, if there are any about."

"My compliments, sir," Dawson said with a smile. "That was a very good suggestion. It should work. And if you must know, it makes me feel a little better about the safety of that carrier force. But now I'd like to make a suggestion to you, sir, if you don't mind? Or to be exact, it's a request. Something I'd like to ask you to do."

The commander nodded and waved one hand.

"Then go ahead and ask it by all means, Dawson," he said. "What is it, anyway?"

Dawson hesitated a moment while a faint frown played across his brows.

"I feel a little better about the safety of the carrier force, sir," he said presently. "But I still feel that Farmer and I have failed in what we set out to do. So if you could arrange it, Commander, I'd like to ask you to arrange for us to see Vice-Admiral Stone. And as soon as possible, too, sir."

"That's just about the easiest thing for me to do, Dawson," the Navy officer said with a grin. "I got in touch with the vice-admiral fifteen minutes after your phone call brought me here on the run. I gave him most of the picture then, and he was very pleased. Naturally he'll want to congratulate you. I'll drive you to the Kaneohe Naval Air Base right away. That is, just as soon as I leave some instructions for the guards downstairs. I've a car right outside."

"Thank you, sir," Dave told him. "I'd be very grateful if you'd be kind enough to do that."

"Wait right here and consider it done," Commander Drake said, and moved toward the door. "I won't be five minutes."

"Now what, Dave?" Freddy Farmer asked as the Naval officer disappeared. "I certainly don't feel like seeing Vice-Admiral Stone. At least not right away. Even in spite of the luck we had in this Yammanato business, I couldn't look the vice-admiral in the eye and not feel that

we hadn't let him down something frightful. And that's to say nothing of how we let down the officers and men in that carrier force."

"Yeah, I know what you mean, Freddy," Dawson said with a nod. "And I feel pretty much the same way. But I'm willing to face the look in the vice-admiral's eye if I can only get him to let us carry on with the unfinished business."

For a brief instant young Farmer stared at him as though he were slightly crazy.

"Unfinished business, Dave?" the English-born air ace presently gasped. "You mean that Nazi spy?"

"Certainly," Dave said. "What did you think I meant? As long as that guy and I are alive in the same world I'll not have a moment's peace of mind. Sure I meant him. And I still want to show him up for the sneaking skunk he is, hiding in a U.S. Navy uniform!"

"Well, naturally I want to do the same thing," young Farmer said quickly. "But I don't think I quite follow you. How in the world do you figure you can reach him? The carrier force is almost three days out from Pearl Harbor now."

Dawson opened his mouth to reply, but at that moment Commander Drake came back up the stairs.

"Let it ride, Freddy," he said in a low voice. "You'll hear me explain it to the vice-admiral. And maybe it would be bad luck if I spoke about it first to anybody else. Just cross your fingers and hope."

"I'll do both of those things, right enough," young Farmer replied. "But you had better make it pretty good, what you're going to say to the vice-admiral. He may be pleasant enough to us, but I fancy he won't fall all over himself with joy at seeing us again."

"Just do what I said!" Dave growled as he moved toward the door. "Just keep your fingers crossed, and hope, that's all."

A short time later Commander Drake ushered Dawson and Freddy Farmer into Vice-Admiral Stone's quarters. The base commandant seemed genuinely pleased to see them. In fact, he said so, and congratulated them on the Yammanato business.

"Commander Drake told me over the phone that there is enough stuff there to sink a ship," he said. "That's fine. Now maybe we can spend all our time thinking about the Japs away from Pearl Harbor, instead of those who are here, and about whom we know nothing. It was a good job, you two, and I thank the powers that be that you came out of the thing with your skins."

I must admit that we worried more than a little about you when you did not return here to the base last Monday night."

The vice-admiral paused and suddenly turned full face to Dave Dawson, and gave him a searching look.

"I have a feeling that you have something on your mind, Captain Dawson," he said. "Am I right? And if so, then go ahead and speak. You have my full permission."

Dave hesitated and glanced sidewise at Freddy Farmer for a little moral support, but the English-born air ace was watching the vice-admiral.

"I'm no good at making speeches, sir," he said a moment later. "And I certainly won't take up your valuable time trying to make one. I only want to say this, sir. The job in so far as Farmer and I are concerned is not finished. We came out here to the Islands to identify him so that he could be put where he wouldn't give anybody any trouble. But we didn't do that, sir, and it was through our own fault. You warned us that we might be marked men, and we were dumb enough to forget your warning and walk right into something that only phenomenal luck got us out of. I suppose everybody makes mistakes, but only fools make the same mistake

twice. And that's just what we did. Once outside that shack in San Diego, and once last Monday night up by Kahuku Point beach. In short, sir, I want, and I'm sure Farmer does, too, another chance to grab that Nazi spy with the carrier force."

"Well, for a man who says he can't make a speech, that one wasn't too bad, Captain Dawson," the vice-admiral said with a smile. "But aren't you forgetting that the carrier force has sailed? That it's almost three days out from Pearl Harbor?"

"No, sir," Dave replied instantly. "Naturally I haven't forgotten that. But . . . well, look, sir. Technically, we are under your command right now. I was wondering if you couldn't order us to fly to the carrier force. Aboard one of the mail Catalina boats. A Cat-boat could reach the force quite some time before the force is within fighter plane range of Truk. That's true, isn't it, sir?"

"Absolutely," the senior Naval officer replied. "Truk is most certainly in the force's plans, but it is not steaming directly there. It will not be within a thousand miles of Truk for several days yet."

"Then there's still a chance, sir," Dawson said eagerly. "Couldn't you assign us as special ob-

servers of the mission for you? In that way we wouldn't be confined to just one of the carriers. We could fly on and off all three. That way we could get a good look at one time or another at every fighter pilot in the force. And . . . well, as we once said, we'll know him the instant we set eyes on him. I know it may sound like a slightly mad suggestion, sir, but I sincerely hope that you will grant permission to carry it out."

"And I would like to express my sincere hope that you will grant it, too, sir," Freddy Farmer spoke up quietly. "Captain Dawson didn't tell me that he was going to make this request, but now that I've heard it, I am completely in favor of it, sir. We fell down on our job, sir, and we only want the chance to make up for our failure, if we possibly can."

The vice-admiral didn't say anything for several minutes. In fact, he didn't even look at either of them. He scowled silently at his fingers drumming on the top of the desk. When eventually he did lift his gaze and look at them he was still frowning.

"It is quite an unusual request," he said. "The Navy doesn't usually fight a war that way. After all you are Army pilots, so it would be most strange for you to act as observers for the Navy. Then, too, the moment the carrier force

sailed from Pearl Harbor it was under the complete command of Vice-Admiral Macon, whose flagship is the Carrier Trenton. I have nothing to do with it at all. It is quite possible that Vice-Admiral Macon will maintain radio silence, save for ship to plane, throughout the entire voyage. A most unusual request, Captains Dawson and Farmer. Most unusual."

The vice-admiral frowned down at his drumming fingers again, and Dave Dawson had the sensation of his heart sliding down into his boot-tops with a thump. Then suddenly after a moment or two of complete and utter silence, the vice-admiral looked up from his desk with a grunt.

"However," he said quietly, "there are such things as extenuating circumstances. Exceptions that prove the rule, and so forth. That Nazi spy is on his way to Admiral Shimoda with valuable information we can ill afford to have fall into Japanese hands. Also, *if* he does slip away from the force he will naturally report on the force to Admiral Shimoda, and that could prove very disastrous for Vice-Admiral Macon's ships. So for those and other reasons, I am in favor of *every* effort being made to identify this man so that he can be put under arrest."

The senior Naval officer paused to clear his

throat, but Dawson couldn't hold his tongue any longer.

"Then you will, sir?" he blurted out. "You will give us another chance?"

"That's right," the vice-admiral said, and tried not to smile. "There happens to be a Catalina with mail and some priority things leaving Kaneohe tonight. I will arrange for you to be on it. I will also give you a letter to Vice-Admiral Macon stating the reason you are joining the force, and what you wish to do. That is as far as I can go in the matter. I cannot order Vice-Admiral Macon to do anything. I can only ask him to co-operate with you in this matter, but I feel quite sure that he will. All right, then, Captains, your special request is granted. And, naturally, I wish you all the good luck and good hunting in the world."

"Thank you, sir, thank you," was all that Dawson could say, because suddenly he was too choked up to speak other words.

And it was the same with Freddy Farmer. One more chance! It was a time when mere words could mean everything, or nothing!

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Satan Strikes

IT WAS a perfect day. There wasn't a cloud in the sky and from horizon to horizon the rolling blue Pacific was flooded with gold from the sun hanging on high. In addition to it being a perfect day the mighty Yank carrier force steaming westward was a sight to catch the throat of even the most self-centered landlubber. In perfect battle array, with cruisers out on both sides, and the destroyers darting about like water bugs, the mighty armada traced a pattern of creamy white wakes on the gold-tinted blue that looked like a painting from another world.

It was indeed something to see and remember always, but Dave Dawson and Freddy Farmer hardly noticed. Slumped down in one of the crash nets aboard the Carrier Trenton, they stared out at the rest of the force with gloomy eyes and furrowed brows. They were depressed, unhappy, and licked. Only sheer doggedness

would not let them admit the latter truth. But it seemed true just the same. For three days, now, they had been with Vice-Admiral Macon's force, and for all the good they were doing themselves, or anybody else, they might just as well have been back at San Diego teaching Navy fledglings to fly.

"Well, what now, little man?" Dawson suddenly broke the long brooding silence between them. "Shall we start all over again for the umptieth time? I mean, check on the fighter pilots once more?"

Young Farmer didn't reply for a moment. He rubbed a hand down the side of his face, shook his head, and sighed heavily.

"What's the blasted use?" he groaned. "That Nazi rat we're looking for can either make himself invisible, or else he just isn't with this force. And that last is what makes me feel like such a fool. What a beautiful trick of fate if that lad is actually thousands and thousands of miles from where we are right now. You know, Dave, we've seen a lot, and we've done our full share of things, but this business is the queerest ever. The trailing destroyers haven't even reported sighting a single water flare. Maybe *we* just dreamed everything!"

"You're telling me?" Dawson growled. "For two cents I could dive right over the side and do the world and the war a big favor. What saps we've been, and still are! Things are certainly screwy in life. Just imagine, a little suggestion and, bingo, all this is the result. It's enough to drive a man nuts, permanently."

"It is, and it has, as far as I'm concerned," Freddy Farmer muttered. "But what did you mean by a little suggestion?"

"The one I made," Dawson said. Then with a shake of his head, he continued, "And just how many centuries ago was it, anyway? Oh well, it was back in San Diego. It was raining, remember, and I suggested that we take a little walk? That's what I mean. If I'd only stuck to reading my book, and not listened to you crab about the California weather, we wouldn't be here."

"Oh, so it's all my fault, is it?" young Farmer flared up. "Well, let me jolly well tell you that I . . .!"

"Easy, Freddy, easy," Dawson cut him off and laid a hand on his shoulder. "I don't mean that at all, pal. We both started this business together, and we both stubbed our toes. Let's not go flying at each other's throats, huh? That would make us a pair of fine guys, I don't think. I'm sorry

if you got me wrong, kid. But let's not blow our tops, huh?"

Freddy Farmer smiled, and there was far more than apology in it.

"Of course, Dave," he said. "I forgot myself, and I ask you to forgive me for being such a blasted fool. I certainly don't deserve your friendship when I act like that. And I guess you know, Dave, that your friendship means more to me than anything else in the world. That's the truth, old thing."

"I know it is, Freddy," Dave told him quickly. "And it is the way I feel about you. So . . . well, that's that, kid. And now we're back where we started. What do you think we should do now? Start making the rounds of the carriers again, with a prayer? Or should we go to Vice-Admiral Macon, and tell him we're a couple of flops, and ask him to assign us to active flight duty with these boys, and maybe earn our board and keep a little?"

"Whatever you say suits me," Freddy Farmer replied with a shrug. "The vice-admiral has been awfully decent giving us the run of the entire force as he has. Frankly, though, I think that everybody else is not only getting fed up with us popping in and off their flight decks, and

snooping around, but they are also becoming very suspicious. Much more of this and we'll upset the morale of the force. After all, they're going into battle soon. And chaps about to go into battle don't want a couple of mysterious nobodies flitting about them. But if you think we should pay another visit to the other carriers, then I'm with you, no matter what anybody thinks. Well, what do you say?"

"Well, I guess . . .," Dawson began and then stopped.

He stopped because he caught sight of the vice-admiral's aide hurrying toward them across the flight deck.

"Oh," he said out of the corner of his mouth. "I guess what we do next has already been decided for us. Here comes Lieutenant Commander Clarke, and he's not just out getting the sunshine. You and I, Freddy, are about to go see the Old Man of this carrier force."

And the truth of that statement was proved a couple of moments later when the lieutenant commander reached them.

"The vice-admiral sends his compliments to you two gentlemen, and requests that you come to his quarters at once," the Naval officer said. "Follow me, please."

A few minutes later the two air aces were alone with Vice-Admiral Macon, a short, thick-set man with a face that could look hard as nails one minute, and all custard pie and sunshine the next. Right now his expression was sort of in between. He nodded politely as Dawson and Farmer presented themselves, and with a friendly wave of his hand indicated that they were to be seated. Then after searching their faces for a moment, he spoke.

"No luck yet?" he said.

"No, sir, I'm sorry to report," Dave replied for both of them. "And frankly, sir, I cannot understand it. We have visited every carrier several times, as you know, of course. And we have seen every fighter pilot at one time or another, yet I will swear that the man we want was not one of them. There's just one thing that occurs to me now, sir. Is every fighter pilot who was with the force in San Diego still with it? I mean by that, sir, because of the mission now being carried out, have any fighter pilots been transferred to torpedo or scout-bomber or dive-bomber squadrons, since the force put to sea?"

The force commander thought a moment, and then shook his head.

"No," he said bluntly. "Every man is serving

just as he did when the force was at San Diego. The only changes have been the fighter pilots that were taken aboard at Pearl Harbor. I'm afraid that you're wasting your time, gentlemen. And I do know that you are causing considerable of a mystery among the flying officers of the force. I do not like that, and something must be done about it. That is one of the reasons why I sent for you."

The vice-admiral paused as though to take time out to select his next words.

"Another reason," he went on a moment later, "is that by sundown tonight we will be within eight hundred miles of Truk. Unless you find your man by then . . . if such a man *does* exist in my force . . . you will be assigned to one of the squadrons for active duty, and are to forget all about this other business. We will be going into action tomorrow, and . . . well, nobody in my command is taking this cruise just for the ride. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, sir," Dawson replied instantly. "As a matter of fact, sir, just before your aide summoned us to your quarters, we had decided to request permission to see you so that we could ask to be put on active flying status. We admit it, sir. We just have been along for the ride. And

we appreciate more than we can say the freedom of movement that you have permitted us. So if we still haven't accomplished anything by sundown, sir, we both will be willing and eager to serve in any capacity you deem fit."

The vice-admiral nodded, and then glanced questioninglly at Freddy Farmer.

"Captain Dawson speaks for both of us, sir," the English-born air ace said at once. "I am not only willing and eager to serve in any way you wish, but I will consider it a great honor, sir."

For the first time since their entrance the vice-admiral gave them a smile. It was warm, sympathetic, and full of understanding.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he said. "The entire force will be glad to have you flying with us. Your past records are not exactly secrets, you know. Very well, then, you can carry on as you have been until sundown. After that you are flying and fighting for the Navy. That is all, and thank you again."

The two youths took their leave of the force commander and returned thoughtfully to the Trenton's flight deck.

"Until sundown," Dawson murmured, and squinted at the sun sliding down the western

sky. "I'd say two hours, or maybe two and a half. Well, back to the old question. What do we do about it now, Freddy? A swell suggestion hasn't suddenly hit you, has it, by any chance?"

"What suggestion?" young Farmer sighed. "All I'm thinking about right now is that I hope tomorrow I get a crack at a hundred of the Jap beggars when we hit Truk."

"Well, it will take more than a hundred cracks at them, and successful cracks too, for me to feel even one degree better," Dave said. Then, as though talking to himself, he murmured, "We'll be eight hundred miles from Truk in a couple of hours or so? That means we must be about eight hundred and eighty miles from there right now."

"You're probably correct," Freddy Farmer said. "But why all the sudden figuring? What of it?"

"Only this," Dawson said, and gazed along the deck at the planes of the sundown patrol being made ready for flight. "It means that this carrier force is plenty close enough right now for our Nazi spy to get there in his Grumman Hell Cat, if he's flying one of those babies."

"And close enough, too, even if he's in a Grumman Wild Cat squadron," Freddy Farmer

echoed. "But you're leading up to something, Dave."

"In a way, yes," Dawson replied slowly, and made a gesture with his hand that included all three carriers. "A last hope, you might call it. I mean, the sundown patrols for all three flat-tops are getting set to go aloft. There isn't time, and it would be foolish of us to try and pay a visit to all three carriers for a look at the pilots taking off. With preparations getting under way to launch planes we'd probably be refused permission to land on the other two flat-tops, anyway. But here's an idea, Freddy. Let's you and I take our Hell Cats up and sort of cruise around."

"Why?" young Farmer demanded. Then as his face suddenly lighted up, "Oh, you mean . . . ?"

"Exactly that!" Dawson cut in on him. "These sundown patrols are simply top-cover protection in case there is a surprise raid by planes from some Jap carrier that maybe has sneaked in close during the day. In other words, the sundown patrols don't go wandering off. We can keep our eyes on all the ships in the air. So if our Nazi friend is flying one of them, and suddenly breaks away from his section and goes sailing off on his own, then we'll see him at once

and do something about it. See what I mean?"

"Perfectly!" Freddy Farmer said excitedly. "And it's a swell idea, Dave. At any rate, it's much better than standing here on this blasted flight deck eating our hearts out. Right-o, then. Let's go get our flying gear and get into the air. I . . ."

The English-born air ace suddenly stopped short, licked his lips and swallowed hard.

"What's up, pal?" Dawson demanded.

"Nothing," Freddy told him. "I just think I have a sudden feeling. You know, one of your crazy hunches. Oh, blast it, I mean that I have a queer feeling that things are going to happen before this day is done."

"Praise Allah they'll be *good* things!" Dawson breathed fervently, and headed toward the companion ladder leading below decks. "Let's go, kid!"

With considerable of their sense of usefulness and futility replaced by new-born hope and renewed determination, the two air aces hurried below to the quarters that had been assigned them aboard the Trenton, and collected their flying gear. From there they went to the Ready Room where all the up-to-the-minute flight data was posted on the huge black-board. They

quickly copied it down on their flight navigation boards, and then went out of the Ready Room and along the companionway leading to the hangar deck, and the short way topside.

They were skirting the planes that were grouped on the hangar deck when suddenly Freddy Farmer gasped aloud and grabbed hold of Dawson's arm.

"Dave!" he whispered hoarsely. "Look! That chap walking past that dive bomber over there. The one just under the light. Good gosh, Dave! It can't be. I . . . But it is! It is! That's the beggar, I swear. It's . . ."

Young Farmer didn't finish the rest. He let go of Dawson's arm and started racing across the hangar deck at top speed. By then Dave had taken a look at the man Freddy had pointed out, and his heart was striving to explode right out between his ribs. The man was garbed in flying gear, but he carried his helmet and goggles in his hand so that his head was bare. And he was across Dawson's line of vision so that only the side of his face was presented. But that was enough. It was more than enough. In an infinitesimal part of a split second Dave Dawson's memory raced backward, and once again he was peering through a narrow crack in the side of

a weather-beaten shack at a Navy ensign with straw-colored hair, eyes that must be blue, and a neck that was slightly thicker than the average neck of a man of that height. And once again, now, he could see no outstanding feature.

"Our man!" he heard his own voice choke out. "The Nazi rat. On this flat-top all the time? Right under our noses, and we haven't spotted him until now? Good grief, how did that happen? How . . .?"

He cut off the rest because by then he was sprinting after Freddy Farmer, and he needed all of his wind for that. Freddy was halfway across the hangar deck, and the Nazi spy was walking casually toward the companionway on the other side. Suddenly, though, perhaps because he heard Freddy's running footsteps, or perhaps because Freddy called out, he turned his head. For the bat of an eyelash he pulled up short and stared, and then he broke into a mad run.

"That man!" Freddy Farmer's voice seemed to fill the entire hangar deck. "Stop him! Stop that man!"

Young Farmer's cry was directed at an aviation machinist's mate just coming out of the companionway on the other side. The Naval

rating stopped, blinked, and stared at the man running toward him.

"A Nazi spy!" Farmer shouted. "Stop him!"

But Freddy's cries were just a waste of breath. The aviation machinist's mate started to put out a hand to signal the Nazi spy that somebody wanted him, but that's as far as he got. The running spy slugged him a terrific blow on the jaw and the Naval rating went down as though the deck had dropped out from beneath him. And in the next instant the spy had dived into the companionway and disappeared. Freddy Farmer was a good fifteen yards from the companionway opening, and Dawson was another twenty yards or so behind his pal.

In an effort to cut down the distance Dawson ducked under the wing of a plane, but he didn't duck low enough. The tip of the wing caught his shoulder, threw him off balance, and sent him sprawling onto the deck. He wasn't even dazed, though, and he was up on his feet almost instantly, but by then Freddy Farmer had disappeared into the companionway, too.

Choking and gasping for breath, Dawson plunged forward and went over the prostrate aviation machinist's mate in a leap and tore into the companionway. The sudden change of

light blinded him for a split second, but he knew that the companionway turned sharp right at the end of twenty yards, and that at the end of the right turn there was the companionway ladder that led directly topside to the flight deck.

By the time he reached the turn he was used to the fairly dim light. But even at that he didn't see the figure sprawled on the deck until too late. The figure of Freddy Farmer. Dawson heard his own voice cry out his pal's name as he strived desperately to swerve off to the side. But his efforts were not enough. His left foot struck one of Freddy's legs and he went flying over young Farmer, and down in a heap.

All the colored lights in the world flashed in his brain. There was so much fire in his lungs that he couldn't breathe. He could only lay motionless, his face pressed against the companionway deck as the vibrations of the carrier's engines went through his whole body. The vibrations of the ship's motions plus the dry sobs of rage and fury that shook him.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Avenging Eagles

AFTER WHAT seemed like a million years spent in a world of torturing paralysis, the power to move and to act came back to Dave Dawson. And even as he pushed himself up on his hands and knees he heard bitter words spill from Freddy Farmer's lips as the English born air ace began to pick himself up off the deck.

"Fool that I am! The dirty beggar! Waited for me and copped me on the topper as I came around the corner. I . . . Good grief! You, Dave? I say . . . !"

"Save it!" Dawson gasped as he got all the way onto his feet. "I haven't time, Freddy. He's top-side, now. You stay here and rest that head. I'll get him for us. I'll get him, or it'll be the last thing I ever do!"

And no sooner had the last word burst from Dawson's lips than there came a mighty sound

from the flight deck above to mock his words. The roaring thunder of planes taking off.

"Wait here, nothing!" Freddy Farmer cried. "We'll both get the blighter!"

Perhaps young Farmer said more. If so Dawson didn't hear it, for he was streaking toward the companionway ladder. He reached it and probably set a new ship's record for reaching the flight deck in jig time. As he leaped out on deck a hundred and one things met his gaze, but only two of them registered on his whirling brain. One was that Grumman Hell Cats were tearing off like a string of beads. And the other that weather, that practically unpredictable feature of the Southwest Pacific, was closing down. The sun was a blood red ball balanced perfectly on the lip of the world. Dark, ugly clouds were sweeping up dead on to the Trenton, which was now turning up maximum knots.

That some five or six Hell Cats had already gone off was like a mule's kick in the stomach to Dawson. Maybe the pilot of one of them was the Nazi spy. If so, in the matter of a couple of minutes he could lose himself in that weather and probably never be seen again. Maybe. And then again, maybe not. Dawson didn't pause to moan or groan over the situation. Instead he

sprinted down the side of the deck to where his own Hell Cat was standing with its prop ticking over, and waiting to be run into the take-off line, in case it was needed aloft.

Dave reached his plane in the matter of split seconds, but just before he reached it Lady Luck smiled upon him for the first time in centuries and centuries. In other words, as the last plane of the sundown patrol swept by him he caught a flash look at its pilot. The pilot had his helmet on, and his goggles and oxygen cup were in place, but Dawson knew in a flash that it was his man. As a matter of fact, as the Hell Cat streaked by the pilot turned his head as though to look at Dawson, and Dave was sure he saw the eyes light up with a glare of triumphant hate.

Perhaps that last was simply a trick of his imagination. He didn't know. All he knew was that the pilot of the last Grumman to take off was the straw-colored haired man he had seen through the wall crack of that shack back in San Diego. That was certain, it was absolutely definite, and it put wings on his feet for the last few yards to his plane.

Members of the deck crew saw him coming, and naturally assuming that he was to take part in the patrol just as he had on other occasions, they

sprang forward to aid him. That was another lucky break. It saved many precious minutes of explaining and making ready for flight. And so it seemed that he had hardly settled himself in the Hell Cat's pit before the signalman was motioning him to gun his engine and taxi into the take-off line. He did that and as soon as he got into position he received the signal to go ahead.

He gunned his powerful Pratt & Whitney full, and the Hell Cat seemed fairly to leap out from under him. Out the corner of his eye he caught a flash glimpse of Freddy Farmer racing toward his plane, but he didn't take time out for a good look. Not once all this time had he really taken his eyes off the plane flown by the Nazi spy. Its identification letter and number were burned in his brain. F Dash Fourteen. That was it. F Dash Fourteen. The mark of a perfect fighter plane flown by one of Hitler's killers.

"But you won't be flying it for long, you dirty rat!" Dave grated as his wheels cleared and the Trenton's deck swept away out of sight beneath him. "It's been a long, long time catching up with you. But that's all ended now. This is the pay-off! And how it is the pay-off!"

As he spoke the last he took his eyes off the other plane for the first time to snap a quick

glance back down over his shoulder. He saw another Hell Cat streaking off the Trenton's deck, and he knew at once that Freddy Farmer was at the controls. A tight grin stretched his lips as he turned forward.

"Good old Freddy, always right there with me," he grunted. "Of course it'll be two to one, you Nazi rat, when usually the odds are the other way around. However . . ."

And that was as far as he got with that. The Nazi's plane, that had been climbing up to get into formation with the rest of the sundown patrol, suddenly cut off to the left and started down in a long power dive. The maneuver brought Dawson straight up in the seat. Had something happened? Had the Nazi gone mad? Why was he losing precious altitude by slicing downward? To do that simply made less sky for Dawson to cover to catch up with him, or at least to get into gun range.

A brief instant later, though, all those questions were answered. As Dave glanced down to the left he saw the thin but thick enough blanket of fog that was already sliding in over the outer ships of the carrier force. Just one look and he knew all the answers, and once again heard the mocking laughter of defeat in his ears.

Yes, that sea level fog layer, was thin, but it was thick enough for a plane to lose itself in very nicely. Perhaps it even grew thicker farther to the south. Dawson couldn't tell as he glanced that way. But he could see that farther south there were banked storm clouds.

"No, no, not now!" he groaned as he kicked his Hell Cat around and down toward that layer of fog. "Not at this late date, please, Lady Luck!"

But if Lady Luck answered it was simply the mocking laughter that he still imagined to be ringing in his ears. And then a moment or two later the Nazi's Grumman was in the fog layer and no more than a faint shadow ripping forward. A shadow that grew fainter and fainter as precious seconds slipped by. In the frantic hope that he could keep track of the speeding plane by not plunging down into the fog layer, Dawson pulled out a few hundred feet above it and held his course to the south. But presently there was no more moving shadow to be seen. The fog had thickened, and the Nazi was gone! As a matter of fact, when Dave took an impulsive glance back over his shoulder he discovered that he was in an aerial world all his own. There was no longer any sign of the carrier force, nor

was there any sign of carrier planes in the air. There seemed to be fog and clouds all about him, yet curiously enough the light from the setting sun seemed to cut through and lend a pinkish glow to everything in that part of the world.

"Freddy, Freddy Farmer!" Dawson suddenly gasped, as he suddenly remembered his pal taking off. "Didn't Freddy see this bird and me go down? Didn't . . . You dope! Find out!"

He snapped the last at himself when it occurred to him there was such a thing as a radio. He had neglected to hook it up during the excitement of his take-off. He did so now, but before he could call out over the air to Freddy he heard the flight officer aboard the Trenton recalling the planes. The planes that had taken off from the other two carriers were being recalled, too. In code, of course, so that no listening Jap ears anywhere on the broad expanse of the Pacific would understand what it was all about.

As Dawson heard the orders he was tempted to break in and tell what had happened and request that all available planes be sent out in an effort to block off the Nazi. But he checked himself even as the desire was born. The recall was being sent out for a very, very obvious rea-

son. Weather was closing down fast and it would soon be impossible for any of the carriers to take their aircraft aboard. They would have to circle about waiting for the weather to clear, or find a large enough hole to get down through. Failing either, they would finally run out of fuel and be forced down into the sea, perhaps to be lost forever. And a mighty aircraft carrier task force about to go into battle could ill afford to lose any great number of its fighter aircraft protection.

"Skip it!" Dawson grunted with an unconscious shake of his head. "They wouldn't be any help, anyway, in this weather. You just can't ask Vice-Admiral Macon to run the risk of losing so many planes, and not even find the rat. No, it's up to you. You, and Freddy Farmer, wherever he is. But call him and . . ."

He stopped himself with another and more vigorous shake of his head. And for several moments he droned forward at full throttle, striving to stab the fog layer that stretched out endlessly beneath him. With reaches of cloud scud a couple of thousand feet above him, it was like flying down a long, long, pink-tinted corridor in a world of beautiful make believe. But it was not beautiful or make believe to Dawson. He hated that sun-tinted fog layer with his en-

tire being. And it was cruel, ugly, heartless reality, and not make believe.

"No, don't call Freddy on your radio!" he said to himself. "He may not be even close. Keep radio silence. You've got to. That Nazi rat has ears, and he certainly understands English. At least don't let him know that you're trying to hunt him out. He'll . . ."

And it was at that instant that the light dawned on Dawson. It was at that moment that his stupid thinking left him, and he got a little horse sense to take its place. What he should really do was so simple, so obvious, and so clear that his cheeks went oven hot from a blush of shame.

"You ten-cent, cockeyed, bat-brained dope!" he ranted at himself. "Of course, of course! That rat is trying to make Truk, isn't he? That's *his* objective, isn't it? Certainly! Then why flub-dub around in this stuff hoping that he'll break up through to let you see where he is? You sap, get this air wagon hitting on everything it's got, and high tail for Truk yourself. Don't try to smoke this rat *out*! Get to the Truk area first, and smoke him *down*!"

With a savage nod of his head to emphasize his words, he quickly made a check of the course and speed he had flown since taking off from the

Trenton's flight deck, and then plotted a course that *should* take him to that little cluster of pin point islands, surrounded by a coral reef, thirty-five to forty miles in diameter, known as Truk. Yes, it should take him there, and he hoped and prayed so with all his heart and soul. Just the same a cold lump of lead formed in his chest and came up to lodge fast in his throat no matter how much he swallowed to get it back down.

"If only Freddy were with me!" he sighed as he swung his Hell Cat on course, and gave the Pratt & Whitney in the nose every ounce of high octane it would take. "Blindfolded, that guy can find any spot in the world just so long as you give him wind direction, or something. Yeah, if he were only here, but he isn't. This is strictly up to you, Captain Dumb Dawson. And I do mean dumb, too. You took so long to get this one logical idea that maybe that Nazi rat is miles and miles on his way there now. And when you show up you'll get a sky full of Jap Zeros thrown in your face for your efforts. Oh well . . . Aw, skip it!"

As though to silence the little taunting, ribbing voice, he banged his free fist against the side of the cockpit. That done, he hunched forward a little bit in the seat and concentrated every bit

of his attention on his flying. Eight hundred miles to Truk? Well, a Hell Cat can do four hundred miles an hour plus. So in a little under two hours he would be there, and . . . it would be yes, or no. Success or failure. And if it was failure, it would be complete failure for him. There would be no turning back to the carrier force with his tail between his legs. There just wasn't enough gas in his tanks for that. If he didn't find the Nazi rat in time, and if he didn't get shot down by Zeros that certainly must be patrolling the Truk area, he would run out of gas and be forced into enemy waters.

"And that will be the same as being shot down, and maybe worse!" he said with a slight shudder as the thought forced its way into his brain. "Wouldn't those Jap butchers love to find a Yank pilot floating around in his rubber life raft! Wouldn't they just love *that*! A nice little pleasant session of target practice, and then . . . Cut it, Dawson! Cut it, fellow, or you'll be driving yourself bats, do you hear?"

He laughed a dry laugh at his ranting words, and then sobered instantly. He happened to glance impulsively off to his left and for the fleeting part of a second he thought he saw the shadowy silhouette of another plane sliding along

through the pinkness that fused and engulfed everything. But when he took a second and longer look there was nothing but a limitless expanse of cloud and fog.

At the end of a half-hour or so the fog beneath him thinned out considerably. He could see faint patches of the Pacific. And then after ten minutes of that the fog disappeared entirely. Rather it rose up to merge with the clouds and leave an area of clear air some five hundred feet high, and the horizon-to-horizon reaches of the mighty Southwest Pacific at the bottom.

Holding the Hell Cat to its course Dawson scanned the surface of the water in all directions, but he did not see a single sign of a ship. Nor did he see any planes when he searched the area of clear air all about him. He was still alone in a world of his own, and for a couple of minutes he toyed with the idea of climbing above the clouds, just in case the fleeing Nazi had done that, and he might be able to spot him. He finally killed off that idea, though, for the principal reason that it would slow down his speed, and he did not have to have anybody tell him that speed right now was the most precious thing in his life.

Speed and time. The two things that can change the whole course of the world. And which

have many times, as history will prove. Right now, they hung in the balance again. At least for him. The speed of his roaring Hell Cat. And the time it would take him to get to the Truk area so that he might cut that Nazi rat down into the depths of the Pacific to stay there for all eternity. And so that the information he was taking to one Admiral Shimoda might be food for the fishes, too.

"And there won't be any little item of him getting me, instead," Dawson grated softly, as a little inner voice seemed to mention that possibility. "I've never scrapped him in the air, but he's one guy I *know* I can nail. I know it, because I know I've *got* to! So that's how it stands, Lady Luck. Just give me the break of being able to catch up with him, and then leave the rest to me. Swell-headed and cocky? Okay, so I am! But let me at him and I'll get him, just the same!"

Those and other tidbits of thought rambled through his brain and came off his lips as he guided his Hell Cat forward under the low-hanging overcast. This was the flight of flights for him. It was, because even if he won he would still lose as far as his own life was concerned. Even if he shot the Nazi spy down into the Pacific he himself would soon follow the rat

down there. Not because he had been hit, or wanted to. Because he would have no choice. There would not be any gas left in his plane. And all the guts and courage in the world; all the fighting spirit and will-to-win determination that ever existed, cannot make an airplane stay in the air when the last drop of gas has been sucked into the engine. The age-old law of gravity comes into full force then, and down you go whether you like it or not.

"Okay, I go down, so what?" he argued with his other self. "What does it matter, if I've already sent that rat down where he belongs? A fellow can't live forever, can he? All right, so why cry over it when your time comes? Didn't some great man once say that the most beautiful experience in life is death? Didn't . . .?"

He cut off the rest with a slow shake of his head, pushed up his goggles, and drew his free hand across his eyes.

"When a guy starts talking to himself this way, he must be going nuts," he grunted. "Boy! Do I wish old Freddy were here with me to steady me a little, like he's done so many times. Good old Freddy! I wonder where he is, now? Did he go back to the Trenton when the recall went out? Or is he . . .?"

He stopped and swallowed hard. Sure, why

not? Freddy had brains. Twice as many brains as he had about lots of things. It wouldn't be any miracle for Freddy Farmer to figure the situation out the same way he had, and to be doing the very same thing that he was doing right now. And as that thought built itself up stronger and stronger in his brain he searched the clear air about him again. But he saw nothing. If Freddy Farmer, too, was winging all out toward the Truk area, then he was somewhere up in those clouds.

No sooner had he figured that one out than two brand-new thoughts rushed into his swirling brain to taunt him, and cause little beads of nervous sweat to form on his face. Supposing Freddy Farmer by some miracle had stumbled across that fleeing Nazi and slammed him down, just as a marksman such as Freddy could do? If so, then *he* was simply flying to his death by drowning, or ultimate capture by the Japs, for no earthly good reason.

That wasn't a pleasant thought, and it sent a clammy shiver rippling throughout his body. And the other new thought made him shiver all the more. Supposing—just supposing this cursed cloud weather carried all the way to Truk? Supposing the Nazi spy stayed up in it until he was

well within the protective ring of Truk's Zeros? If that turned out to be the case, he wouldn't get a crack at that rat in a hundred years. Ten to one that Nazi knew some secret radio signal he could send out to tell the Japs who was approaching and not to attack simply because it was a Yank plane. Supposing . . .

And right then and there Dave Dawson stopped his supposing about things. In fact, he stopped thinking of all crazy things. The clouds above him suddenly ceased abruptly. The Pacific ahead suddenly became as though on fire from the dying rays of the setting sun. It was like flying out from under a huge pink roof. He came out like a shot from a gun, and almost in the same instant he saw a flash of red . . . a flash of sparkling crimson caused by the sun rays dancing off the wings of a plane way off to his right and perhaps two or three thousand feet above him.

The Nazi rat, or Freddy Farmer? That question burned in letters of fire a foot high in his brain, as he banked his Hell Cat to the right, and sent it nosing upward.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Kismet

NEVER BEFORE in all of his sky-fighting career had Dave Dawson been so eager, so all on fire, to establish the identity of a sighted plane as he was now. Every nerve and muscle in his entire body became tensed, and actually ached from the strain. Time and time again, as the prop clawed his Hell Cat upward and to the right, he shoved up his goggles and dashed his free hand across his tired eyes as though by so doing he would improve his vision.

Truth to tell, under any other conditions he would have been able to get a clear view of the plane even before he started to climb toward it. But the position of the dying sun, the glossy red surface of the Southwest Pacific below him, and the tiny patches of cloud that still hung in the sky were all against him. They all worked to distort the distant plane into all kinds of shapes

and outlines. It was something like trying to study a fly through red-colored glasses as the fly circled about a brilliant white light. One instant he would almost see it clearly, and the next it would seem to fade from view altogether, and send his pounding heart racing up into his throat.

"That Nazi rat, or you, Freddy?" he muttered aloud. "And forgive me, Freddy, but I hope that it isn't you. Because if it is you, fellow, then we have lost. He'd have to be out in the open now. So if that ship is yours, Freddy, it can't mean anything else but that he is way out in front of us, and too close to Truk for us ever to hope to get him. You see . . ."

But Dawson didn't finish the rest of that sentence. It was as though a thin curtain had been pulled across the face of the setting sun. A mighty shadow pushed eastward across the face of the world, and there was considerably less blinding crimson light. The plane, now little more than half a mile away, and less than a thousand feet above Dawson's aircraft, stood out sharp and clear. And the plane was a U.S. Navy Hell Cat.

"The markings, the markings!" Dawson breathed, and strained his eyes hard to see some-

thing besides the sharp, clear silhouette of the other plane. "Is it F Dash Fourteen? Or Freddy's number F Dash Twenty? Please make it Fourteen, Lady Luck! If you never give me another good break, please give me just this one. Make it Fourteen, please!"

Five, ten, fifteen seconds ticked by. They seemed as years in length to Dawson. Cannons boomed in his brain, and he felt pins and needles in his veins, not blood. He wanted to shout and yell at the top of his voice. He wanted to do anything that would make it possible for him to see the identification markings on that other plane. The urge was great to let fly a few blasts from his fifty-caliber guns to attract the attention of the other pilot, but with an effort he fought down that urge.

If the Nazi was flying that other Hell Cat, it would be the worst thing in the world for Dawson to fire his guns. At least at this early moment. It would be bad because the other Hell Cat was still some distance away and slightly in front of Dawson's plane. In other words, there was still time for the pilot of that other plane, if he was the Nazi, to keep a safe distance from Dawson and outrun him to the protection of Zeros from Truk.

No, this was a cat-and-mouse play. If that was Freddy Farmer then this stealing up unnoticed was a waste of time. But if it was the Nazi then this maneuver was the best bet in Dawson's bag of air fighting tricks. Right! Get in close, and make sure. Make sure, and then tear in for the kill. And a kill it would be, if that pilot was the Nazi.

"Steady, guy, steady!" Dawson murmured as his nerves began to twang like harp strings. "No matter who it is you'll find out soon. So don't overplay it, fellow. If it's him, then this will be your last chance. No more chances after this one. No. This is the pay-off, the old make or break. The . . ."

Perhaps Lady Luck smiled upon Dave Dawson at that moment, but most likely it was the result of action by the other pilot. At any rate, the other Hell Cat veered slightly toward the south and the rays of the dying sun played full upon the side of the fuselage. And like magic the plane's markings stood out in bold relief. The markings, F Dash Fourteen!

"You, it *is* you!" Dawson panted, and slid his thumb up to the stick button that controlled the electric firing of his gun. "It is you, and I've got you cold. Cold as a chunk of Arctic ice!"

The gods of war in their high places thought differently at that instant. Even as Dawson's thumb started to press down on the trigger button the other Hell Cat swerved sharply and cut right out of the Yank air ace's sights. True, the maneuver brought the Nazi even closer. In fact, that one maneuver sort of put the two aircraft on even terms. That is to say, the Nazi no longer had any safety lead over Dawson's plane. Neither could outfly the other on the flat, now, unless one of the engines went bad.

"Okay by me, chump!" Dawson grated as he relaxed thumb pressure on the gun button. "Make the turn and . . ."

And right then and there the Nazi proved that his maneuver had a purpose. It proved that he had, for some time at least, been aware of the fact that Dawson was sneaking up on him. In other words, the Nazi's swerve was not to change course toward the Truk area. On the contrary it was a deliberate air battle tactic. A swerve to the left, and then suddenly the Nazi came spinning around and down like a flame-spitting demon from Satan's domain.

A far less experienced pilot than Dawson would have died then and there. He would have died, hardly realizing what had hit him.

Too many, many times, though, had Dawson scrapped with the best that the Nazis or the Japs had to offer not to be able to react instinctively to approaching danger. Thus it was, and almost before the thing had become a thought in his brain, he pulled up straight for the sky in the nick of time. The Nazi's withering fire missed him.

At the speed the diving Nazi was traveling it was impossible for him to haul up his nose and get a new bead on Dawson's zooming ship. As a result he undershot his target and went cutting down across the sky.

"Which makes me top man now!" Dawson yelled, and kicked his Hell Cat over and down. "And I kind of like that. Now, wiggle and squirm, you rat. Let me see you twist away from these little things."

Thundering down almost at the vertical, he lined up the other Hell Cat and let go with all of his guns. That is, almost all of his guns. Something was wrong with two of them, and they did not fire. The others, however, did their stuff. And with grim satisfaction Dawson saw his tracers chew into the tail of the Nazi's plane. It wasn't enough, though. The Hell Cat is a very, very tough ship. It can absorb all kinds of pun-

ishment, and the Nazi's Hell Cat was no exception to the rule. Dave Dawson saw it stagger a little in the air, but before he could correct his aim the Nazi was prop clawing upward and around to the left.

"Not enough, huh?" Dawson gritted, and hauled out of his own dive to follow through the Nazi's maneuver. "Well, I'm just the guy who can give you more. Like *this*!"

He was not in position for a tail shot then. The Nazi had pulled out too fast, and his Hell Cat was not letting him down. As a matter of fact, though, it was the kind of a shot that Dawson liked best of all. A rear quarter shot that would permit him to rake the other plane from prop to tail before its pilot could do anything to get out of the way.

The Nazi pilot seemed to sense that truth, and there was no reason he shouldn't sense it in view of the fact that he had been flying as a dirty Nazi spy in Uncle Sam's Navy. Anyway, he belted his plane hard over on wing and tried to whip it down to the vertical. But Dawson followed right through and pressed his trigger button. And it was then that it happened!

Rather, it was then that it *didn't* happen!

With the Nazi cold meat in his sights, not a

one of Dawson's guns fired a shot. Maybe it was that a stray bullet from the Nazi's opening burst had hit something that threw the firing mechanism out of whack. Maybe it was for any one of a hundred different reasons. The cold hard fact was that not one of his guns spoke its piece. And in the next split second the Nazi was out of his sights and in the clear.

During that brief split second Dawson's brain seemed to freeze solid in unbelievable horror. Yet instinct was at work again. Instinct that made him try every way he knew to get his guns working. But it was all in vain. The joke was on him, and the war gods up in their high places were screaming with insane glee.

"No! Oh, no!"

From countless miles away Dawson's own sobbing words echoed back to him. His heart was lead in his stomach, and his head was filled with the flames of an all-consuming rage. Yet with all that he did not give up the ghost and just let his Hell Cat roar down across the sky. The Nazi did not know that his guns had gone out on him. Ten to one the Nazi simply thought that he had kicked his own plane out of the line of fire, and so Dawson had saved his bullets for another try.

At any rate Dawson did not give up. He was made of better stuff than that. Gunless though he was, he still had the advantage of position. He had the Nazi on the defensive, and as long as *he* could keep the offensive he had not truly lost.

"And after all, I've still got one trick left!" he said hoarsely. "One trick that will stop you from reaching Truk, so help me!"

As though the Nazi pilot had actually heard the words, the other Hell Cat zoomed for altitude in a pilot's trick to cut the corner and drop down from above. Dawson was not to be tricked by that one, however. He zoomed himself, and prevented the Nazi from cutting in behind. The Nazi tried it again in the opposite direction, but Dawson stayed right with him, and even improved his position in relation to the Nazi's plane.

But it couldn't last, and no one knew it better than Dave Dawson. A half dozen times he got the Nazi in a cold meat position, and was helpless to do anything about it. And by then the Nazi knew, or could make a pretty good guess as to what was what. As a matter of fact, in the very next moment the movements of the Nazi's plane proved what was going through the pilot's head. The Nazi started to zoom up off to the

left, and then deliberately cut off the zoom and flew right smack across Dawson's sights. Hot tears of rage almost blinded Dave as he saw the Nazi's Hell Cat sail by looking as big as a battleship. The greenest pilot ever to fire an aerial machine gun could not have missed that target completely.

It was then that the Nazi pilot knew for certain, and as his helmeted head was turned Dawson's way for an instant Dave thought he saw the other's face flame up in a look of mad triumph. Dave thought he saw that look, but it might have been his imagination. To tell the truth, his whole attention was on something else. The time to lose or win had arrived. He had fooled the Nazi as long as he could. By his flying he had made the Nazi wonder a little, and then wonder more and more until the Hitlerite took a chance to find out for sure. He did find out, and he probably thought that victory was his now. He could swing away and go on to Truk without danger. Or he could first stick around and polish off this gunless American who had intercepted him.

Yes, perhaps the Nazi thought all those things as he sailed by the front of Dawson's nose and received not a single bullet. But what he proba-

bly did not realize was that his instant of mad triumph was Dawson's moment for a last desperate gamble. A gamble in which one and perhaps both could lose.

"Make the most of it, rat! Here I come!"

Words? Had he spoken them? Or had they simply been the echo of a thought racing through his whirling spinning brain? Dawson didn't know, and he didn't care. He wasn't thinking of anything, now. That time had passed. The time had passed for everything save for mad, furious, smashing action that would stop this Nazi from reaching the Truk area, and rob Admiral Shimoda forever of what he was now probably waiting for with gleaming eyes and drooling mouth.

In the next split second a hundred and one things loomed up large in Dawson's brain. He saw the Nazi's marking F Dash Fourteen stretched up tall as a house. He saw the color of the fuselage with the last rays of the sun dancing off its smooth surface. He saw the Nazi's Hell Cat start to swerve violently. He saw its nose drop down and its tail kick up. He saw the Nazi turn his head and saw him impulsively fling up one arm. He really saw this time the look of wild terror that flooded the Nazi's face.

"Nope! You still lose!"

Like a soothing, comforting whisper those words filtered back to Dave Dawson. And then he slammed his Hell Cat over on left wing, and kicked top rudder with every ounce of his strength. For the infinitesimal part of a split second his plane and the Nazi's plane seemed to hang motionless in mid-air. And then his lower wing sliced against the Nazi's fuselage and cockpit hatch.

He knew that, because he saw it in the fraction of time allowed. And then all the furies of land, sea, and air exploded all about him. All the colors of the rainbow surged into his brain in brilliant balls that blew up in a terrific crescendo of sound. Ten thousand spears of fire pierced every square inch of his body. And demons with red hot sledge hammers pounded their way down into his brain.

Then for an instant, and as though by magic, all sound faded away, and his vision was as clear as crystal. Directly in front of him, so close that he could almost reach out his hand and touch it, was the smoking wreckage of two Grumman Hell Cats entwined about each other. He clearly saw the markings F Dash Fourteen on one of them. But he could not see the cockpit as a section

of wing covered it like a steel band. He thought he saw something start to fall slowly away from the hovering mess of wreckage, but a red film slid across his eyes and the falling object was blotted out.

Yet even as the red blurred his vision his whirling brain functioned at lightning speed. He knew that he had been thrown clear of his Hell Cat, and that he had seen the two crashed ships as his body went tumbling seaward in a free fall. Fall? He was falling? Then he had to yank the rip cord ring of his parachute. Where was it? He couldn't find it. Or was that because he couldn't move his right arm? Couldn't, because there was no right arm there now? Had he lost his right arm?

But what did it matter? Why bother to pull his rip cord ring anyway? The opportunity to float down to his death, rather than hurtle down and get it over with quickly? Death was death, no matter how it came to you. Certainly it was. You only died once. And this was it, for him. Well, weren't a lot of others doing the same thing in this war? Sure! Thousands of them. Millions of them. Wonder what Freddy Farmer will say? Wonder where Freddy is, now? Good old Freddy Farmer. No fellow ever had a pal like Freddy.

God created only one Freddy Farmer. Good old Freddy . . .

What was that noise? It would be nice to see once more. Blind as a bat, now, though. Everything red, and growing redder. A deep, deep red. A funny noise, that. Like a plane. The planes of other pilots who had died? Did a pilot go on flying after he was dead? As dying people hear voices of those who have gone before them, did a dying pilot hear the planes of pilots who had already gone? A funny sound, but a nice sound. Just like an aircraft engine. No sound in all the world so deeply thrilling as the sweet song of an aircraft engine, and the hymn sung by wings in the wind. You had to be a pilot to know that.

So this was it? Well, that was okay. No pain at all. A sort of comforting silence. Like slipping off to sleep in a nice soft bed.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Dead Return

A NICE warm comfy bed. And a soothing silence all about. Rest, beautiful rest in a world of fluffy white silence. It . . .

Like a half drowned man groping his way up through fathoms of silent waters to the surface, Dave Dawson rose up from the depths of unconsciousness. And as a man saved from drowning remembers things that passed through his mind while down in the depths, so were Dawson's first conscious thoughts a continuance of what he had been thinking in another world. A nice, warm comfy bed, and . . .

And though it was still dark all about, the sense of touch returned to him, and his finger tips telegraphed to his brain the fact that he was actually in a warm, comfy bed. He could feel smooth sheets, and a soft mattress underneath him. And then little by little he became conscious of sound. Not individual sounds, but a merging

of all different kinds of sound into a sort of faintly pulsating murmur. And with that faintly pulsating murmur there came to him a sense of motion, too. A gentle vibration that traveled throughout his entire body.

It had all the effect of lulling him into deep and untroubled slumber. But in that it did not quite succeed. It didn't because at that moment his eyes opened slowly and there was the image of Freddy Farmer's face centered in a vast expanse of white. But it was more than an image of Freddy, for the lips moved back in a smile, the eyes glistened with joy, and then came the spoken words.

"That's better, my lad. How do you feel, Dave?"

Dawson stared for a moment, and then closed his eyes tight, but when he opened them again Freddy Farmer's smiling face was still there.

"You dead, too, Freddy?" he heard his own voice speak. "How did it happen, fellow?"

The smiling lips broke into a chuckle, and Freddy Farmer shook his head in positive negation.

"Not a bit of it, old thing," he said. "I'm not dead, and neither are you. Though by rights you should be. How do the arm and leg feel?"

"Not dead?" Dawson mumbled, as he strived

to get his brain functioning faster. "And what arm, and what leg?"

"Yours," Freddy Farmer said. "The left one. Your arm you broke, and your leg you wrenched pretty badly. And you smashed up your face a bit. But, as usual, you'll pull through. You must have protected the rest of your body with your head when you crashed into that blighter. If you'd only waited, though. I wouldn't have let the beggar get away. Your guns went out, eh?"

Dawson didn't say anything for a moment. Instead he used that moment to take stock of himself as best he could. It was rather difficult, because the lower half of his face was bandaged, and the bandages prevented him from looking down his body. It was easy enough to tell, though, that something was wrong with his left leg and left arm. He couldn't move either of them, and to attempt it started little pains shooting around.

"Yeah, my guns went haywire for some unknown reason," he said eventually. "So I had to down the rat the only way I could. But what do you mean *you* wouldn't have let him get away?"

"Well, I don't think so," Freddy Farmer said. "True, I was still quite a bit away when you barged into him, but I think I would have

caught up with him. I screamed blue murder at you over the radio, but I guess your set was balmy, too."

"Didn't hook it up," Dave said. "At the start, I mean. Decided to keep radio silence. I . . . Hey! Then you got the same idea as me, huh? You lost him in that fog, and then decided to light out for the Truk area?"

"Quite," young Farmer said. "I lost you both. My radio was on and I heard all our planes recalled. I ignored the order, knowing blasted well that that Nazi beggar wouldn't go back. I didn't think you would, either. I fancied it would be a three-plane race to the Truk area. And that's the way it turned out. Not bad flying for any of us, what, to get there almost at the same time. But, do you know something, Dave? Know why we didn't spot that blighter sooner?"

"Because we were blind, I guess," Dawson grunted. "Or maybe he spotted us and hid behind something every time we came along."

"No, it wasn't that at all," Freddy said. "It was because he wasn't aboard any of the carriers until the middle of the afternoon of the day we spotted him."

"He what?" Dawson gasped. "But how come . . .?"

"One of those crazy bits of luck that people have without asking," young Farmer said. "Or perhaps the beggar did have some kind of a premonition that we were coming after him. Anyway, when the force was one day out from Pearl Harbor one of the scouting pilots aboard one of the cruisers came down sick. Word was sent to the Trenton for a replacement pilot to be sent over. And our friend was the one sent. The flight officer on the Trenton handled the business, and Vice-Admiral Macon didn't know a thing about it. That was natural, because he had bigger things to worry about. The officers under him took charge of minor details. Anyway, the sick pilot got fit for duty again, and our friend came back aboard the Trenton. In the cruiser's motor launch, of course. I sort of half remember seeing a motor launch pull alongside us that day. But maybe it's simply my imagination, now that I know there was one. Anyway, his name on the Trenton was Brown. Yes, Brown. A nice old American name, with never a Nazi hint about it, the blighter!"

"Well, for cat's sake!" Dawson exploded. "Why didn't somebody tell us that one fighter pilot had been sent to a cruiser to double for a sick guy? What were we supposed to be, mind

readers, or crystal ball gazers, or something? If . . . !”

“Easy, old thing!” Freddy Farmer said in alarm. “You’re in bad enough shape as you are without blowing your top. It was just one of those things. The press of shipboard duties made them forget about Brown’s transference, and the vice-admiral didn’t know. Perhaps the ones who could have told us didn’t take the spy scare very seriously. I’m thankful enough that he was from the Trenton and not from one of the other carriers. Otherwise he would have returned to it that day and we’d never have spotted him. But if I’m getting you all riled up, Dave, I’d better get out of here and have the surgeon pop in and give you something to put you back to sleep.”

“No, don’t go, Freddy, I . . .” Dave stopped short, gasped, and stared at his pal wide-eyed. “Hey! Wait a minute!” he cried. “Where am I, and how the heck did I get here?”

“You’re in the Trenton’s sick bay,” Freddy Farmer said. “And a cruiser seaplane brought you back the day before yesterday. Brought us both back, as a matter of fact.”

“*Both?*” Dawson echoed in amazement. “You, too? But . . . Oh! You ran out of gas and dropped

into the drink, huh? And a scouting sea plane found us both? Practically within spitting distance of Truk?"

"Well, it wasn't exactly like that, Dave," Freddy Farmer said, and a faint flush seeped into his cheeks. "The truth of the matter is that when I saw you parachute down to the water and float around in your Mae West . . . and you can thank it for keeping your face out of water . . . I decided that it was only fair for me to share what I had with you. So I landed as close to you as I dared, got out my rubber life raft and paddled over and pulled you aboard. The next morning the carrier force planes all came over, and a cruiser seaplane was good enough to land and carry us both back here. Sturdy planes those seaplanes to carry two extra passengers. The observer and I had quite a job holding onto you, but, we made it, as you can see."

"Old Freddy, the Dawson lifesaver!" Dave breathed as a warm glow stole through him. "How many times has it been, Freddy? Twenty-nine or sixty-nine times that you've cheated death for me?"

"Rot!" young Farmer snorted. "After all, I didn't have the gas to get back. I had to sit down. I'd have shared my life raft with any poor devil

the same as I did with you. I . . . Oh, blast it! I'd feel frightfully lost without you around, old thing, you know."

"Yeah, I can guess," Dawson grinned. Then the grin faded as he said soberly, "I wonder if that Nazi rat went down with his plane, or if he bailed out, too, and maybe got picked up by some Japs."

"No, the Japs didn't pick him up," Freddy Farmer said evenly. "I was close enough to see that you were the only one who fell clear of that wreckage, and opened your parachute. And even if he had got clear and gone down by 'chute, the Japs at Truk were too busy the next day to bother picking him up."

"So I did pull my rip cord ring," Dawson breathed, as memory of those weird crazy moments between life and death came back to him. "Yanked the ring, and didn't even realize I was doing it. It sure is funny how . . . Hey! What did you say, Freddy? The Japs at Truk were too busy next day?"

"Certainly," Freddy Farmer said. "This carrier force. Remember? They hit against Truk that next day, and the next. That's how a scouting seaplane happened to spot us and take us aboard. Why, I understand that one pilot was shot down

right inside the Truk coral reef and picked up by a cruiser seaplane. Stout fellows, those cruiser seaplane pilots and observers. A lot of the dirty work, and no credit to speak of. But the Truk show was wonderful, Dave. I got in one flight there, myself, as a gunner on a torpedo plane. Think I even got me a Jap plane, but I'm not sure. But it was a marvelous victory. We sank nineteen of their ships, is the report. And the number of Jap planes shot down has been placed at two hundred and one for the two-day show. Imagine! And all the raid cost us was seventeen planes. Not one of our ships was damaged. The Navy chaps certainly gave Hirohito and Tojo a lot to cry about this time!"

"And while all that was going on I've been here out cold and trussed up like a roasted pig!" Dawson groaned. "Now, I ask you! Is that crummy luck, or is that crummy luck?"

Freddy Farmer stared at him and shook his head in mock sadness.

"Yes, yes, quite true," he said with a sigh. "A beastly shame. A blasted dirty trick played on you. As I said to Vice-Admiral Macon, I said, 'See here, Vice-Admiral! My friend Dawson is slightly under the weather, and you have no business sending all these ships and planes and

men against the Japs at Truk until Dawson is better. After all, you know, Vice-Admiral, Dawson is the . . . ' ”

“Okay, okay, don't say it!” Dawson laughed. “I'm a selfish guy. I admit it. Just the same, I sure hate to miss things.”

“No doubt,” Freddy Farmer said with a grin. “But don't forget, in the future, also to concentrate on things missing *you!* And you know what things I mean!”

“So help me, Daddy, I'll never fly into another plane,” Dawson said with a faint yawn. “But thank you for everything, kind sir, and now go away and let me sleep.”

“Consider me gone, old thing,” Freddy Farmer said softly, and smiled down at his pal's closed eyes.

THE END

DAVE DAWSON OVER BERLIN

The last came out of his throat in a strangled cry of grief as a point in the sky ahead suddenly was splashed with flame and white light. German flak gunners had scored a direct hit on one of the R.A.F. raiders. Right smack in the bomb compartment from the looks of the explosion.

"Happy landings, fellows," Dawson said softly with a catch in his voice. "You went clean, and quick, anyway. The way I hope I go, when it comes my turn."

"Amen, chaps!" Freddy Farmer whispered, and then fell silent.

The flashes from the exploding bombers seemed to reach out to the four horizons. Then they diminished into a ball that traced a fiery path straight down to the earth. Although they had seen death strike countless times, neither Dawson nor Farmer had ever gotten used to it. They always experienced the same feeling of horror, the same helpless rage, and the same emptiness in the stomach that they were experiencing now. Seven men had just died before their eyes. Seven brave men who but a short hour ago had lived, and laughed, and felt sure, as all airmen feel sure, that the Grim Reaper would pass them by this time, too. But the Grim Reaper had not passed them by. He had snatched up their lives in one blinding flash of thundering flame. They probably didn't even know what hit them. They just died, and now their comrades were carrying on without them. Carrying on because there was a job to be done; a job that couldn't wait. A job that had to be done tonight, and tomorrow night, and the next, and the next, and on and on until all Nazis had been smashed into the dust, and there was peace again. But seven more would not see that peace, save from their seats of honor in the airmen's Valhalla.